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New York

President:	Mr. De La Sablière/Mr. Duclos	(France)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Li Junhua
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Haneda
	Peru	Mr. De Rivero
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Nasser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mrs. Taj
	United States of America	Ms. Wolcott Saunders

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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06-43915 (E)

The meeting resumed at 3.15 p.m.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have just received letters from the representatives of Pakistan, South Africa and Viet Nam, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In accordance with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The representatives of Pakistan, South Africa and Viet Nam took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The growing confrontation and bloodshed in the region — in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories — are causing the most serious concern in Russia and around the world. The number of victims among the civilian population is growing, and the threat of a full-scale humanitarian disaster is increasingly real.

A comprehensive assessment of the Middle East situation was provided by participants in the Group of Eight (G-8) Summit in Saint Petersburg. The United Nations Security Council, having ended its involuntary vow of silence, should make its authoritative voice heard. We anticipate that its members will shoulder their full responsibilities and will be strictly guided by the principles of the Charter and by the interests of establishing a lasting and comprehensive peace in the region, taking into account the position of all parties and existing accords.

Russia has consistently been committed to vigorously combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We reaffirm the need for immediate and unconditional release of abducted Israeli soldiers. Israel has a legitimate right to ensure its security. However, the scale of the use of force, the casualties and the destruction demonstrate that the actions stated for achieving this purpose go far beyond a counter-terrorist operation. We believe that there must be strict compliance with the norms of international humanitarian law.

Our sense of alarm regarding the fate of the civilian population in the area of hostilities was heightened by the fact that there were hundreds of Russian citizens at the epicentre of the conflict. We thank the United Nations and other international partners for helping to evacuate them.

Normalizing the situation in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories will require a multifaceted effort by the international community. The most important requirement at this point is an immediate cessation of hostilities. We support the appeal made by Prime Minister Siniora of Lebanon. It is essential that all acts of violence, including terrorist attacks and acts of provocation, incitement and destruction, be brought to an end. A ceasefire would allow civilians to freely and safely leave the conflict zones and make it possible to address the relevant problems through political and diplomatic channels.

That is precisely the current focus of diplomatic efforts by Russia, which has sent high-level representatives to the Middle East. We will continue to work to achieve those goals in cooperation with all interested parties.

We are certain that there can be no military solution to this conflict, or to any of the problems in the Middle East. The thrust of collective diplomatic efforts must in future be directed towards the search for practical steps to create conditions for a prompt end to bloodshed and to place this crisis on the track of a political settlement.

Mr. Vassilakis (Greece): I would like to begin by paying respect to the memory of the victims of violence, whether in Lebanon, Israel or Palestine, and expressing our deep condolences to their families for their loss. As Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis said, this violence — any violence — cannot be distinguished as being good or bad. We condemn it in its totality, unequivocally and categorically.

Greece fully aligns itself with the statement to be made later by the Permanent Representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

The current situation in the Middle East is cause for grave concern and risks having far-reaching repercussions for the entire Middle East. Recently in Lebanon and Israel the use of force has inflicted a blow against the highest right — the right to human life. It tests the conscience, the principles and the values of

the international community. It is high time that the violence stop. We must return to diplomacy and create the minimum level of trust among the people of the area to allow for the development of a political process of negotiation leading to a peaceful and lasting solution. In particular, the dire humanitarian situation and the extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure, along with the indiscriminate taking of civilian life, require the immediate attention of the international community. It is obvious that a situation as serious as the current one cannot continue.

We deplore the suffering of the civilian population, whether in Lebanon, in Israel or in the occupied territories. We call upon all parties to use the utmost restraint, and we call for an immediate cessation of hostilities in order to prevent further loss of human life. United Nations agencies and humanitarian workers should be allowed to have access to southern Lebanon to assess the needs of the civilian population and deliver the humanitarian assistance that is needed. In this respect, we support the Secretary-General's appeal to establish safe corridors to allow humanitarian workers and relief supplies to reach the civilian population.

We call for the immediate and unconditional release of the abducted Israeli soldiers, as well as for the immediate cessation of all attacks on Israeli cities and towns. We recognize Israel's legitimate right to self-defence. However, in exercising that right, Israel must abide by its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. Actions contrary to international law cannot serve anyone's legitimate security concerns. In this respect, we repeat our call on Israel not to resort to the disproportionate use of force. In our view, that will not solve the existing problems.

The sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon must be safeguarded and respected. The air and sea blockade of the country must be immediately lifted, and the stability of the country, as well as of its legitimate Government, must not be further undermined.

At the same time, it is imperative that the Lebanese Government be supported so that it can take immediate and effective strong action to prevent further attacks against Israel by Hizbollah. We urge the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), including the disbanding and disarming of all militias.

The proposals made yesterday by the Secretary-General in his briefing to the Council constitute a good, sound basis for a sustainable solution and merit urgent consideration by the Council. The Security Council must now take immediate action, because further delays and silence will impair our collective credibility.

At this critical juncture, we believe that, above all, we should not lose sight of our agreed common vision for a lasting, comprehensive and viable solution of the Palestinian question, which lies at the heart of the whole Middle East conflict.

Greece remains committed to the achievement of such a solution, based on all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace, leading to the existence of two States, Israel and an independent, viable Palestine, living side by side with each other, in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders.

In this context, we firmly support the position of the Quartet that all members of the Palestinian Government must be committed to non-violence, to the recognition of Israel's right to exist and to the acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map.

It is on that basis that the international community stands ready to continue to support the Palestinians in their quest to achieve their goals of building the institutions of a democratic State and economic and social development.

Mr. De Rivero (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation once again deplores the escalation of violence in the Middle East and the loss of hundreds of human lives. This escalation of violence and its extension to Lebanon was provoked by an attack by Hizbollah, an act of aggression unacceptable to any State and which prompted a military reaction by Israel in Lebanon.

The actions of Hizbollah aggravated the spiral of violence in the Middle East, which has been deteriorating since 25 June as a result of a similar act for which the Hamas-led Government of the Palestinian Authority was responsible.

Those abductions and attacks, whose similarity is not coincidental, prompted in both cases a military response by the Israel Defense Force to combat the actions of armed groups that have not renounced violence — groups that form the Government, or part of the Government, of the Palestine Authority and of Lebanon, respectively.

We recognize the right of Israel, which is constantly being attacked by missiles launched by Hizbollah, to defend itself. Nevertheless, it should exercise that right while complying with the principles and norms of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as with international humanitarian law, avoiding the disproportionate use of force, which is causing the deaths of many innocent civilians, damaging civil infrastructure and creating a humanitarian crisis.

The Security Council should address the conflict in Lebanon with a double action. The first action should consist in achieving as soon as possible a cessation of hostilities and, in any case, while this is being achieved, bringing about an immediate humanitarian truce to avoid further deterioration of the situation of the Lebanese population.

The Council's second action should be to achieve a lasting peace agreement, in accordance with resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006) — in other words, an agreement that re-establishes the sovereignty of Lebanon over all of its territory, including the disarmament of Hizbollah and of all the forces that operate outside the authority of the Lebanese State. We therefore support the elements proposed by the Secretary-General and the special mission dispatched to the Middle East, and we are confident that those elements will be duly taken into account by all parties concerned in order to resolve the crisis.

Likewise, with regard to Palestine, it is indispensable to recall here that any agreement should take into account the requirements that the Quartet has made of the Government of the Palestinian Authority. In other words, Hamas must recognize Israel, renounce violence and comply with the agreements previously accepted by the Palestinian Authority itself. A negotiated solution for the peaceful coexistence of two States, Israel and Palestine, with secure and internationally recognized borders is a utopia so long as one of the parties denies the right of the other to exist.

We firmly support the actions being undertaken through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to bring about the release of the Israeli soldiers kidnapped by terrorist groups in Lebanon and in Gaza and to secure their immediate repatriation to Israel, as well as the freeing of elected Palestinian officials who were recently illegally detained by Israel.

Furthermore, we are in favour of the substantive reinforcement of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and its transformation into a force that will help the Lebanese authorities to guarantee the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004).

While the cessation of hostilities is being achieved, it is indispensable that we deal with the humanitarian crisis that is being suffered by the population of Lebanon. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, there are half a million people affected by the conflict, including those who have been internally displaced. Further, more than 70,000 people have had to be evacuated from Beirut, while 115,000 third-country nationals are still in Lebanon. According to the ICRC, more than 100 towns and cities in Lebanon have been attacked by air, sea and land.

Also, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has gathered information suggesting that 300 people have died and a further 860 have been injured, including civilians and militants, and that there has been widespread destruction of public infrastructure, including hospitals, road networks, bridges, fuel stores, airports and seaports.

In the face of this dramatic humanitarian situation, Peru calls for an immediate humanitarian truce, a truce that would permit the establishment of air, sea and land corridors for immediate access for the humanitarian agencies and the evacuation of civilians and third-country nationals. We are sure that we can count on the cooperation of Israel and Lebanon in this. Such a truce is necessary to avoid further loss of innocent life and further suffering of the population. It is also necessary to ensure that the humanitarian agencies have access to those who need them in the present moment. And, finally, it is necessary to take this first step against violence.

Mrs. Taj (United Republic of Tanzania): We thank Mr. Vijay Nambiar and his team for the report on their mission to the Middle East. We commend the

team for being able to cover much ground within a short time, and we are encouraged by their efforts, together with other diplomatic initiatives that are being undertaken to explore ways to defuse the crisis. We also thank Mr. Egeland for his update on the humanitarian crisis in Lebanon and Palestine.

We are alarmed and saddened by the destruction of Lebanon and Gaza in the last 10 days, resulting in death and injury to hundreds of innocent civilians. Over half a million people have been displaced by the ongoing war, disrupting the life of the Lebanese and Palestinian people with devastating consequences. As mentioned by Mr. Egeland, essential supplies are running out and a huge humanitarian crisis is unfolding, which calls for an urgent response from the international community.

Mr. President, since we have been discussing this issue for the past week, and in order to heed your call for short statements, we will not repeat what we said in previous meetings and will limit ourselves to a few comments.

First, while calling again for maximum restraint, we believe that a plan to end the crisis can be assembled quickly. The elements proposed by the Secretary-General yesterday on practical action aimed at stemming the spiralling violence have our full support. In addition, we believe that it is extremely essential that the Security Council respond, preferably through a resolution preceded by a press statement, along the lines discussed in our previous meetings.

Secondly, an immediate requirement is to bring the hostilities to an end in order to stop further loss of life and suffering. We have taken note of the proposal by Mr. Nambiar to secure some form of cessation of hostilities while working on an agreement for a ceasefire, and we rally ourselves to the idea. We also hope that Mr. Egeland's request for the establishment of corridors to Lebanon and inside Lebanon will be granted.

Thirdly, with regard to the Blue Line, we strongly recommend the strengthening of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to make it more responsive and effective. UNIFIL cannot discharge its mandate in its current form, as the operative circumstances have changed. We therefore call for a more robust force with a new concept of operation and powers, if not immediately, then soon enough.

Fourthly, we believe that it is not too early to begin reflecting on the mammoth task of reconstructing Lebanon. In this regard, we support the idea of organizing an international conference to consider timelines for the implementation of the Taif Agreement, together with resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006). The conference should also focus on the delineation of the border with Israel and resolve the dispute over Sheba'a Farms.

Lastly, we wish to reaffirm the need and urgency to find a lasting, comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question based on relevant United Nations resolutions and the Quartet road map.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): First, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his public briefing yesterday and for his proposals. We are studying his proposals urgently. I should like also to thank Mr. Nambiar for his briefing on his very important mission, and also Mr. Egeland for his briefing on the United Nations efforts to deliver much-needed humanitarian relief.

The United Kingdom fully subscribes to the statement that will be delivered shortly by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

The United Kingdom is gravely concerned by the escalating crisis in the Middle East. It threatens the wider security of the region and is causing huge harm to the civilian population, with civilian casualties mounting, particularly in Lebanon. We fully echo the Secretary-General's call yesterday. Hostilities must stop.

I will focus first of all on the situation in Lebanon. We offer our condolences to the Governments of Lebanon and of Israel for the losses of civilian life and to the families of all those affected. We were also very concerned to hear from the Secretary-General that two United Nations personnel are still missing in south Lebanon.

The United Kingdom appreciates the pressure that both the Israeli and Lebanese Governments are under at this very difficult time. Both have a responsibility to help to end the crisis. In that respect, we welcome the Lebanese representative's statement today of Lebanon's desire to extend its authority over all of its territory.

It is important to remember that this crisis was precipitated by Hizbollah. Its militants crossed into Israel and killed eight Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two more. This is a calculated attempt by Hizbollah to further destabilize the region, without the slightest regard for the potential impact of its actions on the people of Lebanon, the Lebanese Government and the wider region.

The quickest and the easiest way to end the current crisis would be for the soldiers to be freed. We reiterate our call for their immediate and unconditional release.

Hizbollah does not act alone. As other speakers have said, behind it, lending support and giving direction, are Syria and Iran. Syria provides material support to Hizbollah and facilitates the transfer of weapons, including thousands of missiles, which appear to be supplied by Iran to Hizbollah.

Ultimately, long-term stability will be possible only if Syria and Iran end their interference in Lebanese internal affairs, in accordance with resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006). I should like to take the opportunity of this statement to urge Iran and Syria to use their influence to rein Hizbollah in.

Against this difficult and dangerous background, the focus of the international community must be on what action can be taken to bring about a durable ceasefire and help the Lebanese people. The United Kingdom is seriously concerned by the number of deaths, casualties and displaced persons that have resulted from this conflict. We have repeatedly and forcefully made clear to Israel that it must act with restraint — the utmost restraint. Israel has every right to defend itself against these terrible acts of provocation, but we call on it to make greater efforts to avoid civilian casualties.

We welcome the United Nations efforts to deliver humanitarian relief, as outlined to us by Jan Egeland. The European Union is also ready to play a key role, as the situation on the ground allows. The United Kingdom has agreed to provide £2 million in immediate humanitarian assistance to Lebanon. We are also arranging for two humanitarian advisers and construction advisers to be sent to the region as soon as possible to assess what more we can do to help.

It is clear from aid agencies in Lebanon that they need immediate access to the displaced and the wounded. They need that access to be safe and secure, not under threat of attack, in order to bring relief to those who need it most. We fully support the Secretary-General's call for the immediate establishment of humanitarian corridors. We welcome what the Israeli representative has said today about evacuation and what other people have said about getting these humanitarian corridors in place. But it is crucial that everyone on the ground cooperate in putting in place not only evacuation facilities but also ways of ensuring that humanitarian assistance gets to the Lebanese civilians on the ground.

We all agree that the hostilities must end, but, as we have heard from the Secretary-General's team, there are serious obstacles to reaching a ceasefire or even to reducing the violence quickly. That underscores the need to create the conditions necessary for a ceasefire which is both credible and durable. We welcome the proposals put forward by the Secretary-General, in particular to the effect that the Israeli soldiers must be released immediately and that Hizbollah must end its attacks on Israel. We must also help the Government of Lebanon have complete control over all Lebanese territory.

In that context, the United Kingdom is working with key partners, including the United Nations, on ideas for an international force to support the Government of Lebanon in implementing resolution 1559 (2004) in order to ensure security in southern Lebanon.

Beyond the immediate crisis, as the Secretary-General said, we need a political framework for Lebanon's future. The United Kingdom is committed to working with him to give effect to this as quickly as possible.

We heard also from Mr. Nambiar and Mr. Egeland about the situation in the occupied territories. The United Kingdom also has deep concerns about the situation in Gaza. The escalation in violence since the 25 June attack at the Kerem Shalom crossing has caused great suffering on both sides and mounting casualties. We offer our condolences to both sides for their civilian losses. We reiterate our call for the immediate and unconditional release of Corporal Shalit. We also condemn the continued rocket attacks from Gaza on Israeli towns. We have called on the Palestinian Authority to prevent all terrorist attacks, including the rocket attacks, and to work for the release

of Corporal Shalit. We very much welcome the work President Abbas is doing to achieve that.

The United Kingdom continues to have serious concerns regarding the humanitarian situation in Gaza. I repeat — we recognize Israel's right to defend itself, but we insist that its actions must be proportionate and in accordance with international law.

We need an urgent end to the current crisis, as many speakers today have said eloquently. At the same time, and as Mr. Nambiar heard from many interlocutors in the region, real peace can come only through a lasting settlement. Our priority must be to create the conditions for an early resumption of negotiations. The events that we have witnessed around Israel's borders in recent days have reaffirmed the great urgency of constructing a lasting settlement and the perils of assuming that there is somehow a military solution to this conflict.

We believe that negotiation is the only viable way to move the peace process forward. Our goal remains a negotiated two-State solution achieved through the road map. There is no alternative to this, and it is incumbent on all of us to work together to find a way through the current crisis to get back onto that track.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): At the outset, I should like to thank the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Nambiar, and Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland for their briefings. Denmark, too, aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Finland speaking on behalf of the European Union.

Last week, I expressed to the Council Denmark's concern that the prospects for lasting peace in the Middle East were fading. Today, those prospects seem more remote than ever. The biggest challenge facing the Council, the United Nations and the broader international community is to work with the parties involved to bring about lasting peace and stability in the Middle East and to bring back hope to the people of the region.

Last week, we condemned in the strongest terms those behind the kidnapping of the Israeli soldiers and the firing of missiles into Israel. We stressed that such actions are simply irresponsible and unacceptable. Without a doubt, Hizbollah bears full responsibility for those deadly crimes. But I want to reiterate another critical point: These extremist elements, and those that support them, are equally responsible. What we have seen and heard over the past few days has only confirmed that those behind the actions are opponents of stability and lasting peace.

Being attacked, as Israel was, grants the right to self-defence. However, defensive actions must be in line with international law. Israel must ensure that its response is proportional and measured and is carried out with full respect for a State's obligation to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure in times of war. Denmark is gravely concerned about the mounting toll of civilian casualties and the extensive damage to the civilian infrastructure. Israel must show utmost restraint and avoid disproportionate action.

Also, Denmark stands firmly behind Prime Minister Siniora's Government in Beirut. A failure of his Government could result in further polarization and radicalization. The overall challenge is to avoid the strengthening of extremism in general in the region.

Trapped in the middle of these grim hostilities are the Lebanese people and other countries' citizens. Their democratically elected Government is struggling to cope with the burden. The humanitarian crisis is deepening with each passing hour. Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland's gripping assessment of the gravity of the situation underscores the urgent need for international action. We therefore strongly hope that agreement can be reached urgently to create humanitarian corridors to provide desperately needed assistance to those under siege and to other countries' citizens. My Government is ready to respond immediately to the United Nations flash appeal that is being prepared.

Denmark agrees that there is an urgent need to stop hostilities and return to the political process. At the same time, there can be no return to the status quo ante. We strongly support the Secretary-General's efforts and hope that all relevant parties will engage in the process and support it. The concrete proposals are still being studied carefully.

The best solution lies in supporting the Lebanese Government's efforts to restore full sovereignty over all its territories and to exercise the sole right to use of force on that territory. That is essential if Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006) are to be fully implemented.

We agree that a stabilization force will be needed to assist the Government of Lebanon in that considerable task. Such a force can be effective only if all relevant parties agree with its deployment and mandate. We pledge to work with the Council and the Secretary-General to develop the concept of such a force.

In my statement today, I have not mentioned the worrying developments in Gaza, since I did that last week. But a lasting solution must thoroughly address all of the outstanding issues in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, in order to be viable.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat that it is of paramount importance that all parties involved in the conflict refrain from any action that would inflame an already critical situation.

Nana Effah-Apenteng (Ghana): Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle East, specifically the tragedy in Lebanon. I wish to thank the Secretary-General's Special Adviser, Mr. Vijay Nambiar, and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland, for their briefings.

We are appalled by the violence that is going on and saddened that the United Nations Security Council has not been able to do the minimum required of it under the United Nations Charter, which is to call for an immediate ceasefire. We totally reject the deliberate and systematic undermining of international law and international humanitarian law and affirm in the strongest terms the time-honoured moral values of justice, equality and respect for the sanctity of human life to which we are all equally bound.

The methods and actions of Hamas and Hizbollah are objectionable. Peaceful settlement rather than violent resistance to the occupation is the answer. The captured Israeli soldiers deserve and must obtain their freedom immediately. But fairness also demands that we do not pretend that there are no innocent victims of Israeli operations, the so-called collateral damage. More often than not, we hear of pre-emptive actions but are offered little evidence. No human life should be so easily dismissed as collateral damage. If we lower the standards of international norms of behaviour, it will come back to haunt us. So we must always be vigilant and consistent in defending our shared values.

Lest our position be misunderstood, let me emphasize that it is not Israel's sovereign right to protect its civilian population and territorial integrity from aggression that is at issue. It is the manner in which Israel, a respected democracy in the Middle East, has gone about exercising that right. The asymmetry in the death toll is marked and disturbing, and it is growing steadily. Lebanon is under complete siege, its land, air and sea under a relentless Israeli blockade. The reality of Israel's absolute military dominance in the region belies the oft-repeated claim that this powerful country must take extreme measures to protect itself, even if that means laying waste another sovereign State that obviously is very weak.

What can justify the sudden displacement of over half a million people and the death of over 300 others, including children? While some countries have the means to evacuate their privileged citizens from the relentless bombardment and wanton destruction going on, where do the displaced Lebanese go? Is this war really about dismantling Hizbollah? The use of force to combat terrorism has often proved to be counterproductive.

My delegation is deeply concerned by reports of the conditions imposed by Israel on the troops of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), as lucidly described by the Secretary-General yesterday. As a member of the United Nations, Israel has an obligation to ensure the safety and security of all United Nations personnel, who should not be made to suffer for their selfless response to international duty.

It is regrettable that Israel has rejected as premature the clarion call by the Secretary-General and the international community for an immediate cessation of hostilities. That was to allow diplomacy to assume a central role in the search for a lasting solution to the conflict. We are convinced that it is in the interest of all parties to heed the Secretary-General's call, because there can be no military solution to the crisis. Continued fighting would only worsen the situation and cause further disenchantment.

In that connection, the set of proposals announced by the Secretary-General yesterday merits serious consideration, and my delegation fully supports them. The proposed deployment of an expanded international peacekeeping force along the Blue Line is of utmost importance. We hope the parties will agree to that deployment. However, peacekeeping is one thing,

while counter-insurgency is entirely different. The effectiveness of such a mission would depend mainly on its military capabilities. Certainly, such a force must be larger in size than UNIFIL and must have a broader mandate if it is to be stronger than the militias on the ground. In the meantime, we await the details on the exact location, size and composition, as well as the mandate, of the proposed mission.

In conclusion, I must reiterate my delegation's expectation that this Council will live up to its responsibilities under the Charter as the organ with primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It must not allow its integrity to be compromised by failing to take a firm position on the situation in Lebanon, and it must be seen to be doing so by the interested public.

It is not too much to ask of this Council, which has been known to be vocal and ready to act on situations deemed as potential threats to peace and security elsewhere, to react to an on-going war in the most volatile region of the world.

The minimum that the Council can do is to support the Secretary-General's appeal, which has been echoed by some other world leaders, for an immediate cessation of hostilities and examine the other elements of his proposals dispassionately. It is important that we also assist the Lebanese Government to establish full control over its territory and to abide by its commitment to implement resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006). We should bear in mind, though, that we cannot attain comprehensive peace in Lebanon unless it is linked with the broader Middle East question, at the core of which is the Palestinian issue.

Ten days into the conflict in Lebanon, the Council has remained silent. By its silence or perceived paralysis, the Council is lending credence to accusations of selectivity and double standards in its consideration of issues. Who can fault those who are agitating for a comprehensive reform of the Security Council?

Mr. Mayoral (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): In recent weeks my delegation has frequently had opportunity to express its views on the current serious crisis in the Middle East. I shall therefore limit myself to commenting on what we consider to be priority aspects.

First of all, with regard to the immediate causes of the current crisis in the Middle East, we reiterate once again that the primary responsibility falls on Hamas and Hizbollah due to their provocative and irresponsible actions in recent months. Argentina has already unequivocally condemned those actions and the rocket attacks against Israeli territory, which have caused death and injuries to numerous innocent Israeli civilians. I take this opportunity to reiterate that those attacks should stop and that kidnapped Israeli soldiers should be immediately and unconditionally released.

In recent weeks we also expressed our serious concern about the disproportionate and excessive use of force by Israel. We reiterate our condemnation of the military actions that have caused the deaths of hundreds of innocent Lebanese and Palestinian civilians and the destruction of basic infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and on Lebanese territory.

There is no doubt that all of that constitutes a new historic tragedy in the region.

Argentina recognizes that Israel has a legitimate right to self-defence, in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter. However, we believe that such a right should be exercised in conformity with international law, in particular with the provisions of international humanitarian law and respect for the human rights of the population. It is clear that those who suffer the most in the Middle East are the innocent civilians, be they Lebanese, Palestinian or Israeli. Protecting them should be the priority of the Security Council and the international community.

Argentina believes that immediate measures should be taken to alleviate the suffering of the Lebanese civilian population. The first step to that end should be a cessation of hostilities and the granting of access to humanitarian organizations to all affected areas. We are witnessing a very serious humanitarian crisis. The establishment of humanitarian corridors is essential so that assistance can reach the affected population, as well as to carry out the necessary evacuations.

We believe that the Security Council should act urgently and declare a cessation of hostilities. That has been Argentina's position since the beginning of the conflict. Unfortunately, our call has not been repeated by all the other members of the Security Council.

While seeking a solution to the most urgent issues, we should also work to create the foundations for a lasting and sustainable ceasefire. We therefore believe that the proposals presented to the Governments of Israel and Lebanon by the Secretary-General's envoys are an appropriate basis for solving the problems linked to southern Lebanon and for fully implementing Security Council resolutions 425 (1978), 426 (1978), 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006). We are prepared to work on the basis of those and other ideas with a view to drawing up a draft resolution that sets out the framework for a lasting solution to the conflict between Israel and Lebanon.

I cannot fail to mention my country's concern about the situation regarding the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and its personnel. We remind the parties of the need to guarantee the safety and security of United Nations personnel. Likewise, we believe that UNIFIL should be able to carry out its mandate, and it should therefore be allowed freedom of movement.

With regard to the Gaza Strip, I would like to reiterate Argentina's concern about the suffering of the civilian population. We believe that right away a package of measures should be considered that addresses an end to the launching of Qassam rockets against Israeli territory by Palestinian groups, the release of the Israeli soldiers, the release of Palestinian officials and legislators, the cessation of the excessive use of force by Israel, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territory and the acceptance by the Government of the Palestinian Authority of the three principles set out by the Quartet.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is also very serious and has worsened even more as a result of the extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure of the territory. We once again demand that the crossing points be reopened immediately to allow for the importing of food, medicine, other basic goods and fuel. We call on the donor community to respond generously to the humanitarian needs in the Gaza Strip.

We believe that it is important to recall that the underlying cause of these conflicts and of other unresolved situations in the Middle East is the absence of comprehensive regional peace. Argentina therefore once again calls for renewed efforts aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace based on the resolutions of the Security Council, in particular, as we have said, resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well the road map, the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace.

The Security Council has an important role to play in all the aspects I have referred to. We should rise to the challenge, act with determination and resolve to fulfil our responsibilities regarding the maintenance of international peace and security. The lives of hundreds of innocent civilians and the prospects for peace in the Middle East depend upon our immediate and decisive action. I believe the time has come to take urgent action.

Mr. Biaboroh-Iboro (Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this public debate on the situation in the Middle East, which is currently experiencing the horrors of war. There is nothing routine about this monthly meeting, given that it is taking place against the backdrop of open warfare in both Gaza and Lebanon.

My delegation would like to thank Mr. Nambiar for the briefing he has given us regarding the mission to the region carried out by the high-level team. I should also like to thank Mr. Egeland for the information he has provided to us about the humanitarian crisis.

It is undeniable that the situation in the Middle East in recent days is greatly alarming. It is also urgent that an effective response from the international community be provided to relieve the suffering of civilians, particularly women and children, hostages and victims of acts of war of unprecedented violence both in Lebanon and Palestine and in Israel.

We already had an opportunity in this Chamber to say what we think about this situation. Today, the time has come to seek appropriate solutions. The destructive violence must rapidly give way to a peaceful settlement and to an end of fighting, which is a precondition for a peaceful solution but is above all a necessary condition to relieve the unspeakable plight of the civilians in that region.

The Security Council, fortified by the primary responsibility that falls to it within the framework of maintaining international peace and security, must clearly and firmly call upon the protagonists to the

conflict to immediately cease hostilities. That is the least that we can do today.

My delegation believes that it is unacceptable, indeed inconceivable, that the Council would maintain a prolonged silence, given the increased deterioration of a situation with dramatic consequences for the life of civilian populations. It is unacceptable that we would indulge in speculations on the outcome of an armed conflict because experience tells us, particularly in this region, that no military victory will produce a sustainable resolution of the complicated issues facing the States and entities of the Middle East.

More than ever, we must heed the moving appeals of leaders and populations in the region and not abandon them to their own fate. We must contribute to easing their suffering, particularly by establishing conditions by which they can move about and have access to emergency assistance via humanitarian corridors in Lebanon.

Yes, we are duty-bound, in order not to be complicit, to respond to the distress of innocent populations who are trapped by a pattern of war and extremism. My delegation calls upon all parties to the conflict to comply with their highest obligation to protect civilians against attack, in accordance with the principles of international humanitarian law.

Yes, we must also, with a view to a lasting settlement, give diplomacy a chance to seek a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East, for which the instruments have already been created and a road map established. In this respect, my delegation greatly encourages the many and varying initiatives that are emerging and that need to be channelled.

Already, our delegation welcomes the personal involvement of the Secretary-General and welcomes the avenues for a settlement explored by the high-level team that he sent to that region. The initial conclusions that were presented to us yesterday are, to our mind, a good basis for a settlement of the crisis in that they give priority to the need for an immediate cessation of hostilities, which is a precondition to political negotiations and diplomatic efforts on all of the problems set out, which need to be considered concomitantly.

That is an approach which would make it possible to reduce tensions and open the door to a lasting settlement of the crisis in the Middle East based on relevant Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road map and the principles of international law.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I will now make a statement in my capacity as representative of France.

I would like to thank Mr. Nambiar and Mr. Egeland for their statements, which supplement the Secretary-General's very interesting speech yesterday.

I wish to state that my delegation fully subscribes to the speech that will be made by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

France is extremely worried at the escalation of violence in the Middle East. In Lebanon, Hizbollah bears responsibility for the unleashing of hostilities, and we condemn in the strongest terms the continued firing of rockets on Israeli cities that blindly kill and wound civilians. But we also condemn the disproportionate response by Israel, whose military operations are holding the Lebanese people hostage, killing large numbers of civilians and causing substantial material damage in Lebanon.

France solemnly reiterates its call for an immediate cessation of hostilities to spare people further suffering and give the search for a diplomatic solution a chance. For now, the parties must observe the utmost restraint and refrain from any action that might put civilians in greater danger. As President Chirac said, humanitarian corridors in Lebanon itself and between Lebanon and the outside are immediately essential in order to guarantee the safety of displaced persons who are trying to leave Lebanon and to deliver humanitarian aid.

At the same time, the international community must urgently tackle the task of finding a solution to the conflict. We know that in order to be effective and lasting, the solution will have to include, on the one hand, the disarmament of Hizbollah or to begin the neutralization of the threat it poses to Israel, and, on the other, the extension of control of the Government and Lebanese army to the south. How is this to be achieved?

While the purely incentive-based approached we tried with resolution 1559 (2004) did not produce the desired effects on this point, we are convinced that there can be no military solution. Israeli military operations are undoubtedly weakening Hizbollah's

military capabilities, but they are also fuelling hate, and they risk reinforcing its audience in Lebanon and elsewhere. By systematically destroying the country's infrastructure, strangling its economy and targeting the Lebanese army, Israel is greatly weakening the Lebanese State. We must think of the day after, when we will have the greatest need for a strong Lebanese State, able to count on a credible army in order to extend its authority throughout its territory.

The Secretary-General reported yesterday to the Council on his efforts and those of the mission he sent to the Middle East. He presented us with parameters and leads for resolving the crisis. We are pleased to observe that they are close to the ideas that France has developed. They provide the basis for developing a coherent solution to the crisis. The Council must face up to its responsibilities. It must intensify its efforts and begin as soon as possible developing a resolution that will offer the framework for a lasting settlement to the crisis.

As far as the Palestinian territories are concerned, France is also extremely concerned at the continued deterioration in the security and humanitarian situation, especially in the Gaza Strip. While recognizing Israel's legitimate right to defend itself against terrorism — in particular against Qassam rockets, which nothing justifies — we call on the Israeli Government to exercise the utmost restraint, particularly to protect Palestinian civilians. We condemn the recent disproportionate military operations against Palestinian towns and refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, which resulted in a heavy human toll, especially among civilians, and considerable damage to basic infrastructure, vital equipment and institutions of the Palestinian Authority.

The Palestinian Authority, for its part, must immediately take all necessary measures to stop the firing of rockets and acts of violence against Israel and its citizens, and to encourage the release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier. We reaffirm that the Hamas-led Government must adhere to the three principles laid down by the Quartet, namely, renunciation of violation, recognition of Israel and acceptance of the agreements that have been signed.

It remains essential to protect the Palestinian Authority as an institution and forerunner of a State and to guarantee the possibilities for future dialogue and negotiation. In this regard, we again call on Israel to release the members of the Government and of the Legislative Council and Palestinian political leaders. The agreement on the crossing points, particularly those of Rafah and Karni, must be implemented and respected.

In the longer term, the international community must not lose sight of the objectives set out in the road map. France remains deeply concerned about the fact that, although the International Court of Justice issued its advisory opinion on the construction of the wall in the West Bank two years ago, the settlement policy and the construction of the separation wall within the occupied Palestinian territory are continuing. Such practices compromise the future establishment of a viable Palestinian State.

It is essential that all the parties take urgent measures to put an end to the hostilities and respect civilians, who are the main victims of and hostage to the conflicts in the Middle East. Diplomatic efforts by the Secretary-General and by a number of countries are under way with a view to helping to bring about a resolution of both crises, which is essential for the future of the region and beyond. France will continue to work tirelessly to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement, based on the rule of law, so that the States and peoples of the region will at last be able to live in peace and security.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council — the body entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security — is meeting against the backdrop of war crimes and crimes against humanity being perpetrated by Israel against the territory and the people of Lebanon and of Palestine. Those crimes have not spared Arab nationals, foreign tourists or even a soldier working for the international force deployed on the border between Lebanon and Israel. Those whose lives were not directly threatened by the actions of the terrorist State have been denied the right to live in conditions of peace, safety and stability and prevented from satisfying the most basic daily needs, including attending school and university and seeking treatment in hospitals.

Today more than ever, the Security Council is called upon to hold Israel accountable for its crimes and to bring their perpetrators and masterminds to international justice. The degree to which Israel and those who cover for it and support it distort facts and manipulate words is shocking, while the value accorded to the human lives that are being wasted depends on circumstance. An Israeli life has a different value and a different degree of dignity from others, especially if the others are Arab or Muslim. The right to life is not considered to be the same in both cases. According to that distorted view, therefore, the Israeli prisoner's suffering is not the same as the suffering of each of the 700,000 Arab and Palestinian prisoners — I repeat, the 700,000 Arab and Palestinian prisoners — thrown into Israeli prisons since 1967. The suffering of hundreds of thousands of Arabs is not equal to that of one Israeli prisoner. The suffering of a single Israeli individual is greater than the suffering of the whole population in Palestine, Lebanon and Syrian.

The distortion of facts does not stop with ethical or moral considerations, but extends to include legal aspects. Israeli claims, and the claims of those who support it in its hostile right to self-defence, lay that distortion bare. It is Israel that has occupied the lands of others by force since 1967. It establishes illegitimate and internationally condemned settlements thereon. It forces out the population and deprives them of the most basic rights provided for in international law and international humanitarian law. Those two laws are considered the biggest victims of Israel's State terrorism.

How can the occupiers, the aggressors — those who have perpetrated carnage against civilians for decades — be in a position of self-defence? Can any member of the Security Council, or other Members of this international Organization, understand the reason why Israeli fighter jets and warships would destroy the Rafik Al-Hariri Airport in Beirut and the infrastructure in Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, Baalbek and other Lebanese towns?

Can we understand why Israel would kill scores or even hundreds of children, women and other innocent civilians in Lebanon and Palestine? Can we understand the meaning or the scale of the bombing by Israel of the Damascus — Beirut highway used by Arabs and foreigners, including diplomats, residing in Lebanon, who were seeking a safe refuge and fleeing the indiscriminate Israeli war machine?

My country has received hundreds of thousands of Lebanese, as well as foreign diplomats and Arab and foreign tourists seeking a safe haven, away from the indiscriminate Israeli destruction machine. Nevertheless, the Israeli war machine has made that road to Damascus fraught with danger. Israel did not even spare buses and other vehicles transporting those people, let alone Arab humanitarian convoys. Unfortunately, volunteers have fallen victim to the Israeli acts of aggression.

While we understand the efforts made by some internationally influential countries to transport their citizens out of Lebanon, we ask about the validity of the concept that discriminates between peoples' lives. Were not those countries supposed to be bringing pressure to bear on Israel in the Security Council to cease firing and to put an end to the bloodbath that is currently under way?

The barbaric Israeli acts of aggression are not just targeting Lebanon, or even international peace and security. They are designed to undermine the credibility of the United Nations itself. Throughout its long history, the United Nations and its resolutions have never been ignored as they have been in the case of Israel.

More than a thousand resolutions have been adopted calling on Israel to comply with resolutions of international legitimacy. However, those resolutions have never been implemented or seen the light of day. Some act as if the law is to be respected by the weak only. That leads us to question the degree of commitment by the mighty to the law and the need for it. What about its credibility or usefulness? Applying such a double standard to international norms would lead to the hegemony of the law of the jungle. We and the people of the world ask: "Where are we going?"

While Israel declares that it reserves the right to interpret the question of self-defence unilaterally, it ignores the right of others to defend themselves, too, against foreign occupation, colonization and aggression, as stipulated in the Charter. Israel, and those who protect it, will always seek, while continuously attempting to distort facts, to abridge the Arab-Israeli conflict — to minimize it — and to ignore the fact that the problem is primarily one of occupation of and settlement in occupied Arab territories since 1967. It is also a problem of displacement of peoples of the region, depriving them of their most basic rights to

return to their homeland, in a flagrant violation of international law.

Lebanon suffered considerably over the past years as a result of Israel's defiance of international legitimacy. The repeated Israeli invasions of Lebanon — in 1978, 1982 and 1996 — and the occupation of southern Lebanon for over 20 years are stark examples of how Israel flouts this legitimacy. Obstructing the role of the Security Council by this or that country — for reasons related to a well-known political agenda, reasons far removed from its role in maintaining international peace and security — contributes to beating the drums of war, gives a green light to Israel to continue its aggression and covers its criminal acts. It also blocks the international community's desire to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement in the region.

We therefore question the benchmark against which we can measure the weight of statements made by a representative of a superpower that is supposedly entrusted, under the Charter, with the responsibility to maintain international peace and security when this representative uses the veto privilege against a draft international resolution to protect the Palestinians, when he calls explicitly for continued aggression against the Palestinians and the Lebanese and rejects a ceasefire. That flagrantly contradicts the concept of the maintenance of international peace and security and constitutes a deliberate obstruction to international legitimacy in carrying out this responsibility.

The Syrian Arab Republic calls on the Security Council to assume the responsibilities entrusted to it by virtue of the Charter, to put an immediate end to the Israeli aggression against the Lebanese and the Palestinian peoples. We hope that the Council's measures will be independent and compatible with the Charter and based on protecting Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity from Israeli aggression, rather than on interference in its internal affairs.

Whoever defends this aggression and shields its continuation is obstructing the Security Council's role to achieve a peaceful and just settlement of a dispute that is as old as the United Nations. In obstructing the Council's role it thus continues to adopt its agendas and unsuccessful policies in the region, and increases the sufferings of the peoples there.

Instability in the region is caused by Israel's continued occupation of Arab territories and the impunity given to Israel by certain influential Powers, allowing it to act as if it was above the law, to the detriment of our legitimate rights in Palestine, Lebanon and the Golan. Furthermore, the unfair and biased policies pursued in our region by superpowers further increase instability and tension there. We therefore wonder: is the new Middle East promised by some superpowers in the region based on granting Israel a licence to kill and to commit aggression against the peoples of the region, and on providing justification, cover-up and protection in order to allow the aggression to continue?

The foreign ministers of the Arab States decided that it was necessary for the peace process to be restored to the United Nations, because Israel and its supporters killed every prospect for peace in the Middle East. The peace that they themselves perceived and tried to impose on certain peoples of the region is agonizing and can no longer be enforced. We do not want the United Nations to be sacrificed on the altar of tragic and irresponsible policies.

My country, the Syrian Arab Republic, was among the founding fathers of the United Nations and among those who contributed to the San Francisco Charter. We will remain committed to the United Nations, because it is our only option in the face of those who break the law and perpetrate State terror, and against those aggressors who destroy the standards of human existence itself. The Syrian Arab Republic has persistently stressed its readiness to achieve a just and comprehensive peace, as well as stability and security in the Middle East region, through the Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories.

In the face of the Israeli aggression campaign against Lebanon and Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic urges the Council to exert pressure on Israel for an immediate ceasefire and put an end to the destruction of the two countries. We also call on the Council to hold Israel responsible for this aggression and for compensation for the ensuing casualties and losses.

The Syrian Arab Republic is making genuine efforts to pave the way for a serious opportunity for diplomatic action aimed at ending aggression and establishing a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

The statement by the representative of the United States, accusing my country of supporting terrorism, is totally unfounded and far from the truth, both in letter and in spirit. The representative of the United States of America wilfully ignores the fact that the Syrian Arab Republic was the first — even before his country — to address collectively the threat of terrorism. Since 1986 Syria has persistently called for the convening of an international conference to define terrorism. It has worked with many delegations here at the United Nations to submit a resolution to the General Assembly to that effect. Since the early 1990s, the United States of America persistently voted against that resolution.

The Syrian Arab Republic works with a high sense of responsibility with the Security Council ad hoc committees established pursuant to Council resolutions to counter terrorism. The chairpersons of those committees have continuously commended Syria's cooperation. Furthermore, Syria has even cooperated with the United States of America to counter terrorism. The information provided by my country to the American side saved the lives of many Americans. Therefore, many senior officials in the former American Administration expressed appreciation for this cooperation. It has become necessary, on both moral and legal grounds, and in every possible humanitarian consideration, to avoid the issue of counter-terrorism in pursuit of certain political agendas aimed at covering up aggression.

Syria abides by internationally agreed legal norms. We in my country idolize President George Washington because he chose to liberate his country. We do not consider him a terrorist. We also respect the principles embraced by President Wilson and teach them to our schoolchildren. We also consider Gandhi to be a nationalist fighter who resisted foreign occupation. We view Jeanne d'Arc of France as a national heroine who fought against foreign occupation. Then there is Djamila Bouhired of Algeria, a national heroine who also resisted foreign occupation. And let us not forget Nelson Mandela.

We view with respect — and I believe others do the same — all who resist foreign occupation and defend the dignity of their homeland. Let me recall here that part of my homeland — the Syrian Golan — has been under Israeli occupation since 1967. The Security Council has adopted a number of resolutions condemning that occupation and calling for its end. Where is the terrorism in the examples that I have cited? How can we consider it that in the light of the experiences of our people? We have to stop confusing the two issues. Counter-terrorism efforts should be based on purely legal considerations and norms, not political agendas that undermine the credibility of the Council and raise questions as to its legitimacy.

As for the accusations levelled against my country in the statement made by the representative of Israel, I think that the same thing can be said about their credibility. However, in that respect, we have to recall yet again that the State terrorism perpetrated by Israel has included many distinguished figures from the United Nations itself. I do not think I would be wrong if I were to say that Count Bernadotte was the first martyr of this international Organization to fall victim to Israeli State terrorism and acts of aggression.

Israel has refused to receive numerous commissions of inquiry established by the United Nations, the last of which was entrusted with investigating the Jenin massacre.

What we are really seeing is a cancer — State terrorism perpetrated by Israel against the peoples of the region, including the Israeli people. The heads of Zionist gangs have become prime ministers in Israel and are known as such in many parts of the world. Therefore those Israeli leaders responsible for war crimes and collective massacres of the Palestinian and Lebanese people, such as the Jenin, Nablus and Qana massacres, as well as the Marwahin massacre a few days ago, have inherited the propensity to do so from their forefathers, who perpetrated the Deir Yassin, Kafr Qasim and Bahr Al-Baqr massacres, among many others.

The real terrorism in the region is the continued occupation by Israel of Arab lands. It is Israel's hostile acts that are given infinite support by some influential countries that have tried to cover up their failed policies by blaming others for their own failures.

In conclusion, let me say that, like Martin Luther King, I have a dream. I have a dream that the Israeli acts of aggression will come to an end. Like Martin Luther King, I have a dream — that peace will prevail in our region and that our people will know stability, peace and development, instead of war, threats of war and the drums of war.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker on my list is the representative of Finland, to whom I give the floor.

Ms. Lintonen (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The following countries — Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Iceland, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova — align themselves with this statement.

The European Union is acutely concerned at the situation in the Middle East. In particular, we are concerned at the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. The European Union deplores the loss of civilian lives on all sides. These developments pose a serious threat to peace and security in the region. The European Union calls for the release of the abducted soldiers and an immediate cessation of hostilities.

The European Union recognizes Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, but it urges Israel to exercise utmost restraint and not to resort to disproportionate action. All parties must do everything possible to protect civilian populations and to refrain from actions that violate international humanitarian law.

It is urgent to stop the violence and return to diplomacy. Only a political process of negotiation can bring lasting peace to the region. It is urgent that the international community engage actively in this process. We express our full support for the efforts of the Secretary-General and of actors in the region. The European Union welcomes an active role on the part of the Security Council, including through considering the possibility of an international monitoring presence. We support the agenda set out in the G-8 statement. The European Union's High Representative, Mr. Solana, is also actively engaged in the region.

Concerning the developments in Lebanon and Israel, the European Union condemns the attacks by Hizbollah on Israel and the abduction of two Israeli soldiers. The European Union calls for their immediate and unconditional release and for the cessation of all attacks on Israeli towns and cities.

The European Union recalls the need for the Lebanese State to restore its sovereignty over the whole of its national territory and to do its utmost to prevent such attacks. The European Union expresses its support for Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. The European Union urges the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), including the disbanding and disarming of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, and strict respect of the sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon. Continued escalation will only aggravate the vicious circle of violence and retribution.

The European Union appeals to all parties to ensure the safe and speedy passage from Lebanon of all those citizens of European Union member States, as well as other expatriates, who wish to leave Lebanon in the current situation. The European Union calls on Israel not to hinder shipping in international waters.

Concerning the situation in Gaza, the European Union remains deeply concerned at the deteriorating situation between Israel and the Palestinians and deplores the resulting loss of civilian life. The European Union reiterates its call for the immediate and unconditional release of the abducted Israeli soldier. It calls on the Palestinian leadership to bring an end to violence and terrorist activities, including the firing of rockets into Israeli territory.

The European Union calls on both parties to alleviate the desperate humanitarian situation of the civilian population and urges Israel to engage in the restoration of the destroyed civilian infrastructure. The Israeli air strikes on Gaza's only power plant have had a far-reaching impact on Gaza's hospitals, food production facilities, water and sanitation systems. The Rafah crossing was open for passage from Egypt to Gaza on 18 July. In addition to the Rafah crossing, the European Union urges that other border crossings such as Karni be opened and remain open to allow at least the passage of humanitarian aid and basic products to Gaza and the safe return of Palestinians currently on the Egyptian side of the border.

The European Union remains particularly concerned about the detention of elected members of the Palestinian Government and legislature and calls for their immediate release.

The European Union commends the efforts of President Abbas to create the widest possible consensus in support of the objectives of the road map. The European Union reiterates that it stands ready to work with a Palestinian Government that meets and implements the three principles of non-violence,

recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance of existing agreements and obligations, including the road map. The European Union encourages progress in the Palestinian national dialogue to that end.

The European Union is committed to pressing ahead with the further expansion of the proposed temporary international mechanism in order to channel humanitarian aid directly to the Palestinians. The European Union and its member States have contributed significantly. The European Union encourages donors and others in the region to make full use of the mechanism. The European Union urges Israel to resume transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues.

This crisis underlines the need for the negotiation of a just and lasting settlement. The European Union calls on both parties to demonstrate urgently an active commitment to the search for a negotiated two-State solution. The European Union supports the central role of the Quartet in that process.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Hamidon (Malaysia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. My statement should be read in conjunction with the statements of the Movement that I have transmitted to you, Mr. President, concerning the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and Lebanon dated 6 July 2006 (S/2006/491, annex) and 19 July 2006 (S/2006/548, annex), respectively.

Our positions on the situation in the region, as set out in this Chamber on many occasions and as contained in the two statements just mentioned, are clear and consistent. The Movement reaffirms those positions and calls on members of the Council to consider them seriously during the ensuing deliberations. I shall not repeat them here. I believe that the members of the Council could better use the time at their disposal to deliberate on practical measures to end the crisis currently enveloping the region, as well as to facilitate efforts to end the occupation by Israel of the Palestinian territories, thereby achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive solution in the Middle East, which should be the overarching framework in this regard.

The Non-Aligned Movement is gravely concerned about the deteriorating situation and the escalation of violence in the Middle East, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territory and in Lebanon. We condemn all acts of terror, violence and destruction. We condemn attacks against civilians and civilian property and infrastructure and deplore the resulting death and destruction. We condemn the abduction and detention of cabinet ministers, government officials, soldiers and other individuals, and we demand their immediate and unconditional release.

Innocent human beings, including infants and children, in the occupied Palestinian territory, Lebanon and Israel are dying and suffering even as we speak in this Chamber. The life of each human being is sacred and must be protected. We realize that no matter how much condemnation there is against anyone and no matter how much we deplore death and destruction, that will not in itself bring an end to the violence, hostilities and casualties in the region. We recognize that the solution could be achieved through the Council and by the parties in the Middle East.

The Non-Aligned Movement appeals to the Council to take decisive action without delay. The barbaric and senseless killings and total madness in the Middle East must be halted immediately. This Council holds the key to peace, security and tranquility in the region. Delay in taking action will result in more death and destruction. Concrete proposals, old and new, including those by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, that would enable the Council to act are before each and every one of you — representatives of States, members of this august body — for consideration. We need not remind you of your duties and responsibilities. You know exactly what they are and what needs to be done, and you must do that now in order to save the lives of other human beings and, equally important, in order to avoid catastrophic consequences in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Let me begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to present Switzerland's view on the current crisis affecting the Middle East. If my oral statement appears limited, as requested at the beginning of the meeting, I refer Council members to the written text.

Switzerland attaches the greatest importance to respect for international humanitarian law and human

rights law. It has repeatedly reminded the parties concerned of their obligations in that respect and will continue to work in that direction. Respect for the law is not a matter for negotiation, nor is it subject to principles of reciprocity. The effects of the violations now being committed in the Middle East can be measured in terms of death, injury and destruction. Those acts also impede humanitarian action.

Switzerland reminds the parties to the conflict that international humanitarian law prohibits attacks on civilians who are not directly participating in hostilities, as well as attacks on civilian property. It reminds the parties of their obligation to distinguish between civilians and combatants and between civilian and military infrastructure, to take all the necessary precautions to preserve the lives of civilians and to avoid damaging civilian property, to respect the principle of proportionality in all military operations, and to refrain from any form of collective punishment against the population.

The personnel, installations and vehicles bearing emblems recognized by the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols are protected by international humanitarian law and must be respected in all circumstances. The parties to the conflict are obliged to authorize and facilitate the rapid passage of all humanitarian aid and to take all practical and possible precautions to avoid attacking them.

In view of the magnitude of the political and humanitarian crisis, the international community has a responsibility to act, and Switzerland hopes that the Security Council is in a position to take such action.

Switzerland supports the efforts of the United Nations and the special good offices mission conducted by Mr. Nambiar and his colleagues. In that context, I would also like to commend the Secretary-General for his judicious suggestions with regard to the establishment of a sustainable ceasefire. My country hopes that the Council will seriously consider the proposals and act swiftly upon them.

Switzerland condemns all acts of violence, provocation and terrorism. There is no doubt that Israel has the right to protect its territory and its population against such acts committed by Hizbollah. Nevertheless, in the light of law and the facts, Switzerland considers the reaction of Israeli armed forces in Lebanon to be clearly disproportionate. The repeated air strikes of recent days against civilian targets are a serious violation of international humanitarian law. The indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hizbollah against population centres in Israel also seriously violates the rules of international humanitarian law.

It is also important to underscore that the situation in Lebanon must not cause the international community to lose sight of the scale of the humanitarian, economic and social crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in Gaza. In that context, under international humanitarian law it is incumbent upon Israel, as the occupying Power, to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian civilian population and facilitate the rapid, secure and unimpeded passage of equipment and aid personnel.

In order to respond to the crisis in Lebanon, Switzerland would like to stress three proposals.

First, we call upon the parties to the conflict to establish an immediate ceasefire. A ceasefire is necessary, given the serious and steadily deteriorating humanitarian situation in Lebanon.

Secondly, we call for the establishment of humanitarian corridors to make it possible to provide full and unrestricted access to victims. We must ensure that access to basic goods and services is ensured. Supplies of water and electricity are becoming precarious. Such humanitarian corridors between Beirut and southern Lebanon, between Beirut and Cyprus and between southern Lebanon and Cyprus, as well as between northern Israel and southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley, would guarantee safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian personnel and goods. They would also enable the transport of injured and sick persons to hospitals and the evacuation of civilians from combat zones.

Thirdly, Switzerland supports the proposal for the deployment of an international security and monitoring force to southern Lebanon. In order to respond effectively to the present crisis, such a mission would need to have a mandate to guarantee a ceasefire, secure the Israeli-Lebanese border and facilitate, by its presence, a negotiated settlement of territorial disputes. Such an international security and monitoring force could also temporarily take control of the Sheba'a farms area while a settlement of that territorial disagreement is awaited and in order to reduce tensions resulting from it. The force should also make it possible to contribute to the implementation of

resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), in particular as regards the disarmament of all militias.

As highlighted by the Secretary-General, the establishment of an international force should be supplemented by a set of political and security measures that would ensure that the ceasefire is sustainable and that the situation does not relapse into the status quo ante.

Switzerland welcomes the efforts of all actors who are working to resolve the current crisis. However, it is imperative not just to manage the crisis but to find a real solution for all the unresolved conflicts in the Middle East. The crisis in Lebanon, like that in the Palestinian occupied territory, cannot be viewed solely from the perspective of terrorism and counter-terrorism. A comprehensive approach to settle the totality of Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts is required.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Sardenberg (Brazil): It is with deep sorrow that we are once again witnessing the escalation of violence in the Middle East. The spiralling and unchecked use of force that started in Gaza has reached Lebanon. The conflict, which is deplorable per se, is now characterized by a rapidly growing use of indiscriminate force. Brazil strongly condemns the attacks perpetrated by Hizbollah, initiated by the kidnapping of two military personnel. Those attacks have killed or wounded several military and civilian persons in northern Israel. We also condemn the attacks carried out in Gaza. No cause or grievance justifies terrorism, which we firmly repudiate.

Brazil reiterates the provisions of resolution 1559 (2004), which calls for the dismantling and disarmament of all militias in Lebanon. Although we recognize Israel's right to self-defence, we are of the view that Israel should act with utmost restraint in order to avoid further civilian casualties and damage, which are likely to spur a new cycle of violence, causing more victims. Such restraint will be the key to any solution to the present crisis.

Brazil condemns the disproportionate use of force that has resulted in the loss of innocent lives and heavy damage to the Lebanese and Palestinian infrastructure, in flagrant violation of the most basic principles of international humanitarian law. All forces in the conflict should allow humanitarian assistance to immediately reach the affected population.

At least seven Brazilian nationals, including three children, perished as a consequence of the Israeli military incursions into southern Lebanon. The Government of Brazil has already extended its condolences to all the victims in Lebanon and their families. We are arranging for the evacuation of a large number of Brazilian nationals. I should note that many thousands of Brazilians currently live in the affected regions.

Peace can be attained only by the resumption of a diplomatic process involving all interested parties. The Government of Brazil supports the efforts undertaken by the United Nations to achieve a ceasefire and the release of the abducted Israeli soldiers. We believe that the diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives currently being undertaken by Secretary-General Kofi Annan must be seriously considered by the Security Council with a view to obtaining an immediate cessation of hostilities and establishing conditions for achieving a durable solution to the crisis.

Through the Security Council, the international community must urgently fulfil its responsibilities and take immediate action to prevent a further escalation of the conflict. A lack of action by the Council in such a flagrant case threatening international peace and security would only contribute to weakening its credibility.

Brazil is convinced that stability ultimately depends upon the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in all its aspects. Unilateral and other types of non-negotiated solutions are not likely to bring about peace, but only precarious truces that are broken in bloody conflicts such as the one we are witnessing today. The international community must not remain passive before the deterioration of the conflict and the destruction of Lebanon as a viable nation.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to wish you every success. We are convinced that, given your wisdom, qualities and abilities, you will guide the work of the Council to

a successful conclusion. I should also like to thank your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Denmark, for her wise and brilliant leadership of the Council in the month of June.

I would also like to thank you, Sir, for convening this public meeting of the Council to once again consider the serious situation engulfing the occupied Palestinian territories and Lebanon as a result of the actions of the Israeli Government, its aggression, its intransigence and its insistence on continuing a policy that has led to much damage and destruction and has produced many dead, wounded and displaced persons.

Yesterday we heard a briefing by the Secretary-General that focused on the need to end the aggression. We appreciate his efforts and those of his staff to bring about peace and security. We agree with the briefing on the need to have the international community assume its role with courage and creativity in order to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue and also settle the root causes of the conflict in the region, namely, the lack of comprehensive and just peace.

No one would doubt Israel's ability and skills at slapping together a pretext to justify pursuing its aggression and to cover its tracks, create chaos and expose the region to greater disruption and tension. This all-out war pursued by Israel against Lebanon and, earlier, against Gaza cannot be justified by Israel's pretext. It is regrettable that, despite what has taken place in Lebanon — planned destruction, premeditated killings and planned sabotage — the Security Council has not yet found enough reasons to intervene, while its responsibility is to maintain international peace and security.

Today's international relations are in a very dangerous state because of the primacy of the concept of use of force over law and human values and custom. That has taken us further from the rules of justice and equity and has enshrined a double-standard policy in political positions. It has also undermined the rules of international law in an effort to erroneously justify the legitimate right to self-defence that is set forth in the United Nations Charter. This runs contrary to the opinions of the International Court of Justice with respect to the basis of the legitimate right to self-defence and the conditions that justify such right. This principle is enshrined in international law, but it has been converted into an instrument to justify the aggression pursued by the Government of Israel.

International disputes such as this one can be resolved not by sending in armies or firing rockets or bombing from the air, but instead by a commitment to implement the provisions of international law and the principles of justice and equity. It is urgent to end the illusion and arrogance of military power, of barbarous oppression, targeted killings and collective punishment in violation of international law and humanitarian norms and values.

History will not pardon the international community for its failure to ensure justice for the Palestinian people and the people of Lebanon, for leaving any solutions to the conditions set by Israel and for erroneous arguments and pretexts put forward, and leaving the task to Israel to create peace as it sees it and according to its positions — not peace that is based on international law. This is not peace; it is surrender. Failure to use the criteria of justice, the passivity of the Council and its failure to assume its duties and responsibilities have allowed for the ongoing Israeli occupation and the expansion of Israeli settlements. Those failures have also allowed for addressing the Middle East question on the basis of Israeli interests.

All of this continues to be the very reason for the failure of the peace process in the past and in the present. The imbalances and biases with respect to the Israeli State and the failure to implement the road map set by the influential Powers and the Arab peace initiative have killed the peace process in the past and will kill it in future phases. Meetings and conferences, statements and promises are all in vain if they are aimed at just pretending to implement something without addressing the root causes, namely, occupation and repeated aggression by Israel against civilians and the destruction of their property and livelihoods.

Saudi Arabia condemns the war pursued by Israel and its premeditated and repeated destruction and its unlimited violations of human rights, with the express purpose of inflicting suffering on civilians without any regard for international law or human considerations.

We issue a warning to the international community of the seriousness of the situation in the region and the fact that it is sliding towards a climate of war and a new circle of violence whose results will be difficult to predict, particularly given the failure of international action and of Israel's aggressive policies.

Israel must bear responsibility for its barbaric acts and must undertake to compensate Lebanon for

serious material damage caused by its aggression. This barbaric war is an extension of policies of occupation and hegemony as pursued by Israel in the region.

Saudi Arabia firmly supports the Government of Lebanon and supports its efforts to uphold the interests and the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon, as well as its efforts to extend its authority throughout its territory.

Our Kingdom also supports the Palestinian Authority in its efforts to control the situation and to uphold the unity of Palestine. Based on Saudi Arabia's position of principle — solidarity with the legitimate national regimes of brotherly Lebanon and of occupied Palestine — we call upon the international community to shoulder its legal and humanitarian responsibilities, in order to put an end to the condemnable Israeli aggression, to protect the Lebanese people and their infrastructures and to support the efforts of the legitimate Government of Lebanon that are aimed at protecting the independence and sovereignty of Lebanon and its people and at extending its authority throughout the national territory.

We also call for an end to the blockade imposed by Israel against the Palestinian people. We need to support the efforts of the National Authority to achieve their unity within the framework of national dialogue.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Yousfi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): First, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting, which has been called for so many times by the majority of the United Nations family, who are concerned at the dramatic worsening of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and in Lebanon. For the second consecutive week Lebanon has been subjected to intense bombardments, the victims being the civilian population, which are causing massive destruction to the basic infrastructure so vital for the functioning of the country.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his presentation yesterday to the Security Council and say here that my country takes note of the proposals to put an end to the crisis that he detailed. We share the concerns with regard to the alarming humanitarian situation following the Israeli aggression against Lebanon.

Algeria is following with the deepest concern the developments of the tragic events in the Middle East. We robustly condemn the blind attacks by the Israeli army on the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples. The incidents that appear to be at the origin of the new aggression cannot justify or explain the collective punishment that Israel, by flouting the rules of international law and international humanitarian law, is inflicting today on a sovereign State and on its innocent civilian population.

Algeria calls upon the international community to end its silence, to abandon the complicit silence in which it has taken refuge since the start of the recent dramatic events in the region, and to unreservedly condemn the Israeli aggression and impose an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in order to find a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the crisis in the Middle East.

In particular, we call upon the Security Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter and to respond without delay to Lebanon's request for a ceasefire and for the lifting of the blockade imposed by Israel on the air and sea borders of the country so that the Lebanese Government can extend its authority throughout the country and recover all of its territory, including the Sheba'a farms, and implement the 1949 armistice, as reaffirmed in the inter-Lebanese Taif Agreement.

We also express grave concern about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation following the attacks by the Israeli army, and we appeal to the international donor community for a massive and generous response to the distress call by the Lebanese Government to relieve the suffering of the people, who are so sorely tried.

The tragic situation in Lebanon — like the repression, behind closed doors, in the occupied Palestinian territories — shows us more clearly than anything else could the urgent need for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question, which remains at the core of the upheavals that have beset the region for decades.

Unless one wants to make entire peoples disappear from the face of the Earth, legitimate resistance to occupation will not go away as long as the causes that have given rise to it are not eliminated. The pretext of fighting terrorism through the pure and simple recourse to State terrorism that is now being

employed against Lebanon and its people will probably have effects opposite to what is sought. There is no doubt that the resistance will emerge from the new acts of aggression and the massacres being committed with even more determination. Rather than melting away, the resistance will simply grow in the face of the Israeli occupation of Arab lands and the blind repression that is being systematically carried out.

In addition to its disproportionate response and the excessive use of force against the innocent population and vital civil infrastructure of Lebanon, Israel is making thinly veiled threats against other countries, raising the spectre of a conflagration in the entire region of the Middle East. The dubious pretexts that have now practically put an end to a peace process that had shown such promise must not once again fool the international community and cause it to succumb to the temptation to allow Israel to continue its new enterprise. It is up to the Security Council to assume its full responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and to oppose attempts by certain countries that wish to impose their own vision of peace on neighbours that unfortunately have made the mistake of being weak.

In conclusion, I reaffirm my country's position that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace is one indivisible whole that cannot be achieved without Israel's total withdrawal from occupied Arab territories. A just and lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East must be based on the Arab peace initiative adopted at the Beirut Summit, on respect for resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and on the principle of land for peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker on my list is the representative of Egypt, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Although today's meeting is being held within the framework of the periodic review of the situation in the Middle East, in particular the occupied Palestinian territories, it has particular significance, as it is being held at a critical time for the Middle East — a time of tragic violent incidents from which innocent civilians are suffering. The gravity of the situation is intensifying daily.

The current source of threat and tension is not only the continuous military operations by Israeli forces in Palestine and Lebanon — the region has witnessed more violent wars in the past. The real problem is the feelings of frustration among the Arab peoples vis-à-vis the feeble positions taken by the Security Council in the face of these repeated Israeli aggressions, which seek to achieve long-term strategic goals through military force, in total contradiction with what all of us here — including, I would hope, the permanent members of the Security Council — are striving for: a comprehensive and sustainable peace through negotiation, based on justice, equality and mutual interests.

The core issue is not the capture of one Israeli soldier in Gaza, or two others in Lebanon, but the continued occupation by Israel of Arab lands in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria since 1967, as well as its determined effort to change the facts on the ground in a manner that does away with any opportunity for the Arab parties to regain their legitimate rights to their usurped occupied lands. That is the issue that the Security Council has completely failed to address, despite numerous Council resolutions confirming that the only solution to the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence is to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab lands.

In this context, it must be made clear that Arab States have accepted mediation efforts outside the scope of the United Nations, as a way to bridge the differences in opinion, with the aim of reaching a just peace that responds to the interests of both the Arabs and the Israelis. That does not in any way imply that the Council or any of its permanent members should relinquish their responsibility towards the Middle East peace process as an issue that affects and poses a threat to international peace and security, including violence against civilians. The Council has held meeting after meeting on the protection of civilians and of children in armed conflict. Indeed, it is planning to hold another meeting on the subject on Monday.

It is regrettable, therefore, that the Council has failed to provide a minimal level of concrete protection to civilians and children in Palestine and Lebanon only, among other conflict areas all over the world. This raises questions about the supposed link between the Council's theoretical discussions on these issues and its ability to address them on the ground.

Egypt has worked over the past years with various parties to prevent escalation and to achieve peace, focusing on diplomacy to contain repeated

threats in the region. Egypt will continue those efforts, whether between the Israelis and Palestinians, or between Israel and Lebanon, with a view to achieving an immediate ceasefire that opens the door for a comprehensive political settlement.

In this context, we have closely followed the ongoing consultations in the Security Council concerning the elements that the Secretary-General proposed yesterday, 20 July, as a potential basis for a settlement. However, Egypt believes that any negotiations on a settlement requires a firm decision by the Council today for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire on both the Palestinian and Lebanese fronts.

At the same time, the Council must address, as quickly as possible, the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in Gaza, in addition to responding to Lebanon's call for relief and for the lifting of the land and sea blockade imposed on it by Israel, and to allow Lebanon to receive the much-needed humanitarian assistance.

Once this is done, it will be possible to negotiate some of the elements that can constitute a basis for temporary arrangements between the parties concerned, including the exchange of prisoners and detainees, asserting Lebanese sovereignty over all its territories, thus allowing it to implement the Armistice Agreement of 1949 and the Taif Agreement, in addition to Israel's acknowledgment of its own responsibility for the destruction that it has inflicted on Palestine and Lebanon, and its responsibility to provide compensation for such damages. All these elements should be a prelude to commencing the final status negotiations on all tracks, as quickly as possible, under the auspices of the United Nations, and in accordance with a plan of action to be elaborated and monitored by this international Organization as an honest and trusted broker, one entrusted with fully implementing the relevant resolutions of the international community related to the settlement of the conflict, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1515 (2003) and the principle of land for peace.

The current situation places additional responsibility on the Council, not just in terms of expressing sympathy for the victims, condemning the targeting of civilians and infrastructure, or providing humanitarian assistance, but also in terms of resolving the key problem, which generates one crisis after another. This is to be achieved by ending the continued Israeli occupation of Arab lands in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.

Today's crisis is yet another test for the Council and its role in the region. We believe in the Council's ability to succeed in the face of this challenge and to assume its responsibilities in achieving peace and security in the Middle East through undertaking credible measures leading to the end of the Israeli occupation and the achievement of a comprehensive peace — a peace that will guarantee all countries of the region the security and stability for which they strive.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Ms. Euge (Norway): Norway calls for an urgent cessation of hostilities.

Hizbollah must cease its armed attacks and return the abducted Israeli soldiers immediately.

While we recognize Israel's inherent right to self-defence, we believe that all use of armed force must satisfy requirements of necessity as well as proportionality. It is imperative that the civilian population be protected in accordance with international humanitarian law. The indiscriminate and excessive use of force is prohibited.

Norway urges Israel not to resort to disproportionate action. We must prevent the violence and conflict from expanding into neighbouring areas.

We call on the parties to end hostilities immediately and to take all necessary measures to protect the population from the consequences of war. Civilians must be protected and given safe passage. Moreover, humanitarian and relief workers must be given unrestricted and safe access, both for themselves and for relief supplies. All protected persons who desire to leave the areas concerned, including foreign nationals, shall be entitled to do so in accordance with international law.

A peaceful solution to the situation in the Middle East cannot be found through military action. Only a political process and negotiations involving all parties can yield a comprehensive and lasting peace. What is needed is that the parties return to the negotiating table as soon as possible. This is the only place where a lasting solution may be found. We fully support the

efforts of the Secretary-General and call for active and urgent Security Council efforts in this regard.

Norway expresses its full and undiminished support for Prime Minister Fouad Siniora of Lebanon and calls on all parties to respect the political and territorial independence of Lebanon.

We remain deeply concerned about the continued deteriorating situation in Gaza. Israel's attacks on vital infrastructure constitute a form of collective punishment that is unacceptable.

It is obvious that the humanitarian needs are enormous. Norway is deeply concerned by the swiftly deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Middle East. In accordance with the assessment given by the Secretary-General in his statement to the Council yesterday, the lives of more than 500,000 people in Lebanon are being directly affected by the military operations.

Norway stands ready to respond substantially, and the Norwegian Government has decided to allocate 530 million in humanitarian assistance to the region. The Norwegian contribution will be channelled through non-governmental organizations and the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Prince Al-Hussein (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, at the outset, I wish to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month and to extend my appreciation to your predecessor for her efforts in administering the work of the Council during the month of June.

We are gravely concerned at the dangerous escalation in our region as a result of the engagement between Israeli forces and Hizbollah that quickly escalated throughout the past week, resulting, as is usual in such circumstances, in civilian casualties. I wish to reiterate the Jordanian Government's clear position in condemning the practice of violence and the killing of civilians, whoever they may be.

The Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan strongly condemns the Israeli aggression against Lebanon, its use of force and actions outside the scope of international law, leading to the loss of innocent lives and the destruction of civil institutions and infrastructure in Lebanon. What is taking place in Lebanon runs counter to our vision of a region living in peace and prospering as a result of reform efforts and democratic processes. The region, as we see it today, is, unfortunately, headed towards destruction. Indeed, the region will suffer significant strategic losses as a result of disproportionate Israeli military operations in Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories — actions in blatant, grave violation of the provisions of international law — but also as a result of the positions of some radical groups that run contrary to our vision of peace. Those groups have chosen to advocate and promote violence and escalation rather than align themselves with the track initiated in Madrid in 1990 — a peace process that we all have been working so hard to maintain over the past years so that peace could be enjoyed by all the peoples of the region. Clearly, they chose violence and escalation over contributing to the building of a sustainable peace.

A decision to go to war is not taken by a faction or a group. Legitimate Governments should act responsibly and in accordance with international law and international legitimacy. In this context, I wish to reaffirm Jordan's position in supporting Lebanon's unity and enabling the Lebanese Government to exercise full sovereignty over all of its territory.

The Jordanian Government views these dangerous developments with grave concern. My Government warns against taking any measures that could undermine Lebanon or its sovereignty and which could lead to unforeseen results. Accordingly, Jordan calls on the Security Council to fulfil its responsibilities to stop this dangerous escalation. It calls on all parties to de-escalate and to take rational and responsible steps to prevent any further aggravation of the situation, and it also calls on all parties within and neighbouring the Middle East region to cease any other provocative activities.

I wish, on behalf of the Jordanian Government, to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his efforts to resolve this crisis.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is continuing to deteriorate due to the continuing excessive military operations by the occupying Israeli forces in Gaza and in various areas of the West Bank, which lead, on a daily basis, to the death of innocent Palestinian civilians. I reiterate my Government's condemnation of Israel's continued widespread military operations in the occupied

Palestinian territories and of the use of collective punishment that Israel imposes on the Palestinian people. This has caused a serious humanitarian crisis that threatens also to cause a security catastrophe in the Palestinian occupied territories.

We call on both sides, Israeli and Palestinian, to respect all signed agreements reached between them, including the understandings reached at Sharm el-Sheikh. We call on them to put an end to all measures that could further escalate and aggravate the situation. We call on them to focus, alternatively, on the political process. In particular, we call on Israel to respect international law that it violates with great indifference and to end all practices that violate the human rights of the Palestinian population, including all forms of occupation.

We condemn Israel's continued restrictions on the freedoms of the Palestinian population, its military measures, its ongoing settlement activities and the building of the separation wall — practices that do not help the Palestinian Authority implement its part of the parallel obligations under the road map. We call on all Palestinian groups and factions to deal with the situation in a way that serves supreme Palestinian interests and aspirations. We applaud President Abbas for his genuine efforts to contain the situation and revive the political process.

Peace in the Middle East requires an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories on the basis of internationally binding resolutions. It requires that a final, agreed solution be found to the Palestinian refugee problem, on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). To achieve this result, all concerned parties need to take responsible steps, motivated by strong political will, to stop the current escalation across the board and immediately resume negotiations, because unilateral measures and the use of force will not lead to a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Military operations do not lead to stability and security in the region. We therefore call for an immediate ceasefire and for the exercise of maximum self-restraint. We all realize the different political and security challenges we face in the region. We call for an immediate return to the peace process. Failing that, the region will suffer devastation to the extent that it will be very difficult to start over from any recognizable point.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker on my list is the representative of Indonesia, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Jenie (Indonesia): Mr. President, let me start by thanking you for having convened this extremely urgent meeting. I wish also to thank Special Adviser Nambiar and Under-Secretary-General Egeland for their valuable briefings.

The rapidly deteriorating situation in Lebanon and Palestine has brought the region once again into a situation of deep crisis and taken both countries to the edge of a humanitarian catastrophe, with repercussions far beyond the region. The Government and the people of Indonesia are in full solidarity with the people and the Governments of Lebanon and Palestine.

On television, on an hourly basis, we see the faces of the hundreds of innocent civilians, many of them children, who have fallen victim to the brutal Israeli military campaign, and we are witness to countless civil infrastructures being destroyed. We strongly condemn this collective punishment, which unfairly and unjustly holds hostage all innocent Lebanese and Palestinians.

Yesterday, in his briefing to the Council, Secretary-General Kofi Annan also underlined the precariousness of the situation and proposed a package of concrete actions to defuse the conflict. My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to him for his efforts and initiatives to resolve this crisis.

Israel's military action clearly constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, the Fourth Geneva Convention and other rules of humanitarian law. My delegation strongly condemns this and urges the international community to take action to immediately halt it. We believe that a sense of urgency is required in the Council, given the dire humanitarian situation and the continuing loss of innocent civilian life and destruction. In view of the scale of destruction and the casualties resulting from Israel's indiscriminate attacks and its disproportionate use of force, it is difficult for my delegation to comprehend why the Council — as the main organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security — is still unable to respond quickly and effectively.

In that connection, we join the call for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire as the most critical step towards the speedy delivery of

humanitarian assistance, particularly to civilians, in the conflict areas. Indonesia supports fully the establishment of an international peacekeeping force, under the auspices of the United Nations, to be deployed immediately to monitor and enforce the ceasefire. Indonesia stands ready to participate by contributing a military contingent to the force.

We further observe that the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) expires at the end of this month. In view of recent developments, this is a timely opportunity to extend and reconfigure its mandate to respond to this complex situation, including providing security for the channelling of humanitarian assistance. We are pleased that the Secretary-General reflected this important aspect in his briefing yesterday. This is particularly important in view of the need for security, not only for all the peoples in the region, but also for the humanitarian personnel who will be putting their lives on the line.

Another important aspect of this package of solutions is the need for a reconstruction and rehabilitation programme for Lebanon and Palestine. It is the position of the Indonesian Government that this reconstruction and rehabilitation must form part of the peacebuilding process in the region.

Indonesia further wishes to reiterate its commitment to peace in the Middle East and to the creation of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State under the two-State solution, as provided for in the road map. We emphasize the urgency of reviving the peace process in order to achieve a just solution to the conflict, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the road map and the Arab peace initiative of 2002. It is also important to support the Lebanese Government in its efforts to maintain its political independence, extend its authority over all of its territories and exercise its full sovereignty over them, and implement the 1949 agreement, which was reaffirmed by the Lebanese in the Taif national accord.

We call on the international community to take urgent steps to avert a wider humanitarian crisis and further bloodshed, and we hope to see the path to peace reopened as soon as possible. We appeal to the Security Council to deliver a unified and constructive resolution to immediately halt the atrocities and the cycle of violence in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker is Mr. Yahya Mahmassani, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Mahmassani (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, allow me to begin by thanking you for having convened this meeting and offering us the opportunity to participate in the deliberations of the Security Council today to discuss developments in the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian issue, and assess the repercussions of Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip and its continued aggression against Lebanon.

In the absence of a clear response by the Security Council to the Israeli acts of aggression and escalation of the situation in Lebanon and Gaza, and in view of the regional and international consequences related to this issue, as well as the Security Council's failure to act decisively vis-à-vis that situation — Israel continues its aggression against the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples. Israel is deliberately destroying the infrastructure of Lebanon and Gaza, in order to impose the fait accompli policy and achieve objectives and interests that are broader than what Israel claims to be the goal of its military campaign — the release of the Israeli soldiers. The goal is actually to destroy Lebanon and Gaza and impose the logic of force in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Despite the good offices and the positive proposals of the Secretary-General and his team, as well as other international parties, to find a solution to the conflict, Israel continues with a stark, defiant attitude, to reject the repeated appeals of the international community, target civilians, destroy vital services and infrastructure and impose collective punishment on the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples while holding them under siege. Moreover, it denies international relief organizations access to the sick and wounded, as well as to the hundreds of thousands of displaced and disaster-stricken families. The report submitted today by Mr. Egeland stresses the need to provide access to humanitarian assistance in Lebanon in order to avoid an imminent humanitarian crisis.

Therefore, we urge the Security Council to adopt a resolution calling for a comprehensive and immediate ceasefire and a halt to all military operations, to pave the way for negotiations and diplomatic consultations. Israel's destruction of Lebanon will have grave repercussions in the region that will not serve any interests but only exacerbate extremism and lead to a

further deterioration of the situation. We believe that Israel may have agendas and objectives that exceed those it claims to have.

It is clear that the current situation is a tragic reflection of the failure and total collapse of the peace process and relevant committees aimed at finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Against the backdrop of this grave and deteriorating situation, the Council of Ministers of the League of Arab States met on 15 July 2006 to address the situation. It condemned the Israeli aggression against Lebanon and decided to call upon the international community, and, particularly, the Security Council — to assume its responsibilities and act immediately in order to call on Israel to put a complete stop to its military operations. In addition, it urged all parties to respect the principles and provisions of international law and international humanitarian law, implement the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of civilians in time of war, de-escalate the situation, put an end to the spiral of violence, and seek a settlement through dialogue and negotiation. The Council of Ministers stressed the fact that the continuation of the current situation poses a grave threat to regional and international peace and security. Therefore, it is imperative that a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict be achieved, in accordance with the terms of reference of the peace process and the relevant United Nations resolutions — given the fact that occupation is the root cause of all the violence and tension in the region.

The Council of Ministers of the League of Arab States reiterated the Arab position, as expressed in the Arab peace initiative of the fourteenth Arab League Summit, held in Beirut in 2002, and decided to call upon the Security Council to convene a high-level meeting to consider the Arab-Israeli dispute in an innovative and comprehensive manner, given the halting of the political process and the failure of all other efforts to resume the peace process. It entrusted the presidency of the Council, the Chairmanship of the Arab Peace Initiative and the Secretary-General with the coordination of efforts for that purpose.

The Middle East stands at a historic crossroads today. Thus it is incumbent upon the Security Council to fully assume its responsibilities and discharge its mandate to address the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict, with a view to preserving the Council's credibility and enabling us to achieve fair, comprehensive and lasting solutions, and be able to implement them, in such a way to ensure lasting peace and security in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker on my list is the representative of Australia, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Hill (Australia): Thank you, Mr. President, for giving us the opportunity to contribute to this very important debate. Australia is gravely concerned about the escalation in violence in the Middle East, which has already resulted in a large number of casualties. Australia extends its condolences to the Governments of Lebanon and of Israel, and to the families of all of those affected. Australia recognizes Israel's right to act in self-defence. We call on both sides to exercise restraint, to avoid civilian deaths, to avoid damage to civilian infrastructure and to refrain from acts which escalate an already dangerous situation.

We need to bear in mind responsibility for the current crisis. It began with the attacks on Israel by Hamas and Hizbollah, including the capture of Israeli soldiers and the launching of rockets and mortar bombs into Israel. Australia condemns those actions and calls for the unconditional release of the hostages taken by Hamas and Hizbollah. We also call for an immediate end to the rocket attacks on Israel. Those must be the first steps towards the resolution of the current conflict.

The Australian Government is extremely concerned with the deteriorating humanitarian situation. The Australian Government has already provided some $A 2 million through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for humanitarian assistance to Lebanon.

The Government is also working to ensure the safe evacuation of Australians from Lebanon. We have about 25,000 people in Lebanon. We are extremely worried about the situation of Australians in southern Lebanon in particular. We call on all parties to facilitate the safe evacuation of foreign nationals.

Our priority must be to create conditions for a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire. This can be achieved only through the full implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions 425 (1978), 426 (1978), 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), in particular those elements that address the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese

militias and the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory. This means the disarming of Hizbollah and control by the Government of Lebanon of the area between Beirut and the Israeli border.

A long-term solution to the Middle East conflict must involve acceptance of Israel's right to exist in peace and the need for the emergence of a Palestinian State. Those countries in the region with influence over Hizbollah — Syria and Iran — should exercise that influence to prevent continuation of acts of violence. By arming and supporting those extremist groups, they are threatening the wider security of the Middle East.

Australia also expresses support for ongoing diplomatic initiatives, in particular the mission team dispatched to the region by the Secretary-General. We also note once again that the G-8 would welcome an examination by the Security Council of the possibility of an international security/monitoring presence. In Australia's view, any multilateral force must have a robust mandate to enable it to guarantee both Lebanese sovereignty and Israel's security. That means the force would have to assist the Lebanese Government to exercise its sovereignty and prevent Hizbollah from repeating its actions that have precipitated the current crisis.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): Although Turkey has aligned itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union, I should nevertheless like to expound upon a number of issues that we deem fundamental at this critical and highly sensitive juncture in the region.

The briefing that the Secretary-General gave to the Security Council yesterday clearly illustrated the dire and dangerous situation prevailing in the Middle East. It also pointed to the ways and means to put an end to the bloodshed and to emerge from the present turmoil and impasse.

Innocent Lebanese, Palestinian and Israeli civilians are losing their lives. Lebanon is facing destruction, and the infrastructure in the Gaza Strip is being devastated. What is more, those tragic events, if unchecked, might have negative implications for the region, which is already burdened with intractable problems. Given the volatile situation on the ground, the international community should have been more active in preventing the escalation of tension from reaching its current proportions.

We cannot in any way condone hostage-taking, and we cannot deny the right to self-defence. Israeli military personnel have to be released immediately. The hostage-takers should have realized by now that their action has been totally counter-productive and has led to great loss and suffering among their own peoples.

On the other hand, Israel should not resort to disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force and violence. We cannot allow the destruction of Lebanon or of the hopes of Palestinians for a viable State. What is currently taking place in the region goes far beyond self-defence and in the long-run will not serve the interests of Israel. Furthermore, by fomenting negative sentiments, it damages prospects for dialogue and reconciliation, which are at the heart of the two-State solution. We call on all parties to act with the utmost restraint.

In order to stop civilian casualties and the destruction of infrastructure, the first thing that needs to be done is to achieve a ceasefire. At the same time, the three abducted soldiers should immediately be handed over to Israel. The elected Palestinian officials should be freed. We hope that we will eventually reach a stage when women and children prisoners could also be released. The relevant parties should immediately start to work on putting in place the elements that could form the political basis of a lasting ceasefire, as stressed by the Secretary-General. The countries in the region, as well as the international community, have a moral duty to create a positive atmosphere towards that end and to prevent the region from falling victim to violence, misery and desperation. We must ensure that common sense and moderation prevail in the Middle East.

On the other hand, we should all agree that the root cause of what we are witnessing is the continuation of the Middle East problem. Until and unless a just, equitable and lasting solution is found to the problem, there can be no permanent peace and security in the region. Unilateral steps and arrangements and the use of force are no substitutes for a comprehensive settlement.

For decades, Turkey has provided substantial assistance to Palestinians. In the light of recent events,

that assistance will continue unabated. Turkey is also prepared to contribute to the efforts to bring relief to the suffering Lebanese people. Both peoples need the full solidarity and support of the international community.

What is happening in the region, if not stopped immediately, will go down in history as a most regrettable episode for all of humankind.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Chabar (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to thank you, Mr. President, and the other members of the Security Council for having convened this urgent meeting to address the new escalation in the Middle East. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his efforts and good offices aimed at finding a solution to this crisis. We also thank him for his briefing to the Security Council on the recent developments in the Middle East.

The Moroccan Kingdom is, of course, following with great concern the current serious situation in the Middle East and the developments of the past few days, in both Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. In this connection, the Moroccan Kingdom strongly condemns the use of excessive force, in contravention of all international humanitarian instruments. In that regard, we would like to express our solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian and Lebanese peoples.

The current situation in the region is likely to worsen, given Israel's determination to continue its aggression against the brotherly Lebanese State, targeted at its basic infrastructure, and its vital sites using the methods of collective punishment and displacement of thousands of innocent and defenceless civilians. Because of the bombardment, the number of displaced persons is constantly increasing, which will lead to a serious humanitarian crisis unless the international community responds in a serious manner. It is also worth noting that, in view of the worsening crisis in this brotherly country, it is increasingly difficult for our Lebanese brothers to access food and other basic supplies, given that there is no emergency plan to provide assistance to victims. In that context, the Moroccan Kingdom urges the international community to act promptly to contain this crisis and allow humanitarian relief agencies to deliver emergency humanitarian assistance to victims. In solidarity with the Lebanese people, the Moroccan Kingdom responded swiftly to the Lebanese Government's appeal, and sent humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of the brotherly Lebanese people.

Needless to remind the Council that this aggression adds up to another aggression against the Palestinian people, perpetrated in silence and in the absence of the international community. The Palestinian people are experiencing destruction of infrastructure, the murder of innocent people and arbitrary arrests of symbols, officials and leaders of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people's legitimate representatives.

We note with great concern the inability of the Security Council to take the necessary measures in the face of this tragic situation to put an end to this aggression, so as to pave the way for diplomatic action to find a solution to this crisis. We strongly urge the Security Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations, particularly with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security. In that context, the Moroccan Kingdom would like to express its support for any initiative that could contribute to the following: first, an immediate ceasefire, in order to pave the way for diplomatic action to defuse the crisis; secondly, a lifting of the blockade against the Lebanese State; thirdly, support for the Lebanese authority in its endeavour to exercise its sovereignty and control over its entire territory; fourthly, the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Lebanon so that it can face this crisis, and the opening of secure humanitarian corridors in order to bring the necessary aid to civilian populations; fifthly, the free movement of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) so that it can carry out its mission, particularly in providing humanitarian assistance and protection to innocent civilians.

Lastly — and this pertains to the Palestinian cause — the Moroccan Kingdom, calls for the release of all Palestinian ministers and elected representatives, who were arrested by the Israeli army, and reaffirms the need for an immediate end to the violent campaign in the Palestinian territory and for the urgent withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Palestinian territories, as well as for an end to the policy of collective torture and the targeting of civilians.

The Israeli Government's persistence in its present policy signals that the cycle of violence and

counter-violence will continue. This represents a concrete threat to regional and international peace and security. In this context, the Moroccan Kingdom urges the international community to strive for a lasting, just and comprehensive settlement to the Middle East issue and expresses its deep conviction that negotiations remain the only way to bring about a peaceful settlement and international legitimacy.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Zarif (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me to begin, Mr. President, by congratulating your delegation on assuming the Council presidency, as well as your predecessor for her able stewardship of the Council last month. I also wish to thank you for convening this open meeting on an issue that is truly threatening international peace and security.

The international community is witnessing with horror and indignation the daily exacerbation of two cases of blatant and premeditated aggression and multiple war crimes perpetrated by the Israeli regime against the people of Palestine and Lebanon under absurd and all too familiar pretexts. Meanwhile this Council, entrusted with the responsibility of preserving international peace and security and suppressing acts of aggression, is forced into inaction and appeasement by the patrons of the aggressor.

Ten long days of blanket and indiscriminate air, missile and artillery strikes against civilians and civilian infrastructure across Lebanon have gone by while this Council has been prevented from even calling for a ceasefire. Meanwhile, more than 350 innocent civilians have been murdered, over a thousand maimed and hundreds of thousands rendered homeless in a proclaimed response to the capture of two soldiers.

Terrorism in the truest sense of the word is on display, as the aggressor gives short notice before beginning to bomb entire neighbourhoods and regions. With bridges, roads, tunnels, seaports and airports already hit and a complete blockade imposed, terrorized civilians are left to wonder how to flee and where to seek refuge. Still more daunting, with the increasing lack of food and medicine, attacks on humanitarian convoys and disrupted water and electricity supplies, a serious humanitarian crisis is in the making.

No stretching of international law or of the principles of the Charter — even by the most highly paid lawyers, pundits or politicians — can logically sell such unbridled, disproportionate and indiscriminate barbarism and collective punishment against civilians as self-defence.

The aggression against Lebanon followed similar aggression against the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian people were and continue to be subjected to the same collective punishment by the same perpetrators. In Gaza too, the civilian infrastructure is devastated and the civilian population terrorized. The latest United States veto in the Council further emboldened the aggressors to continue and widen their crimes with apparent impunity.

Yet if history is any guide, while the war machine of the aggressor may be able to lay waste to buildings and infrastructures, kill and maim civilians and take their elected representatives hostage, it is impossible to intimidate the people of Palestine and Lebanon into submission, quash their desire to live free from occupation and terror and crush the hope of refugees to one day return home. In fact, experience indicates that such onslaughts strengthen, not weaken, the resolve of the people to resist aggression, occupation, intimidation and terror.

And while the massive propaganda machine may try to reverse the truth and spread smokescreens to hide the ugly face of aggression, millions of the peoples of the United Nations who have turned out in the streets across the globe know exactly where the blame should lie and which regimes rightly belong in the axis of evil and terror. They know who are the culprits and their supporters who have destabilized the region, frustrated the aspirations for peace and justice, punished entire populations for their democratic choice and plunged the Middle East into chaos and who are actively provoking a wider conflict.

The brutal collective punishment that the Lebanese and Palestinian people are now enduring is the Israeli signature brand of aggression, which the peoples in the region have experienced time and again in the past several decades. The new round is more alarming as it occurs at a sensitive time when various Lebanese communities and parties are engaged in a national endeavour to reach a comprehensive understanding through an all-inclusive national

dialogue, an effort that the aggressors aim to defeat as well.

It is important to note that this Israeli onslaught is part of their designs on Lebanon, exemplified in their repeated violations of Lebanese borders and airspace, holding on to the Shaba'a farms and keeping Lebanese detainees. Those designs have continued in the years since their retreat from that country. In fact, the blanket air strikes and artillery and missile attacks against targets across Lebanon immediately after the border incident on 12 July are indicative of a pre-existing plan. Wide-ranging operations aiming at, among other things, imposing sea, air and land blockades on a whole country in a sensitive region could not have been carried out without prior planning and prior coordination with the supporting Power and the receipt of the necessary green light. The joint rejection of all calls for ceasefire is further proof.

The current position of the United States Government is not only the culmination but pushing to the extremes of decades of unswerving support for Israeli aggressions against the Muslim and Arab people in the region, leading, inter alia, to 31 vetoes and supporting the flouting of those resolutions that, under special circumstances, escaped the United States veto.

More importantly, it is regrettable that the Security Council, long after such grave breaches of international peace and security and the threat of their spillover into adjacent areas, has been rendered incapable of addressing the crisis, utterly failing to live up to its responsibility under the United Nations Charter. That failure has been taken as a licence by the aggressors to kill and wreak havoc across Gaza and Lebanon.

It would be a travesty of justice and grossly against the interest of peace and stability in the region if the Council, after 10 days of inaction, was forced to simply relay the Israeli conditions and help to impose them on the Lebanese and Palestinian people. An immediate and unconditional ceasefire and an end to the siege of Lebanon is what the peoples of the United Nations demand and what the Security Council should try to achieve. While many lives are being shattered, families broken apart, civilian infrastructure devastated and the stability of the wider region threatened, it is cynical to place the plans and interests of the occupying regime ahead of those of others and refrain from even calling for an immediate ceasefire.

We support a comprehensive solution to the crisis that takes the legitimate demands of the aggrieved people into account, including the release of the Lebanese and Palestinian detainees, and holds the aggressors accountable for the lives lost and the infrastructure devastated.

Let me just state for the record, in response to what has become a patented and, indeed, tired smokescreen for the Israeli representative and his supporters in their attempts to evade responsibility for the crimes that are being perpetrated, that my Government categorically rejects the baseless allegations against Iran that were repeated today in the Council. Those allegations are merely part and parcel of an elaborate Zionist scheme to break resistance to aggression and invasion in the region and to deflect attention from the root cause of all tensions in the Middle East, that is, the continued occupation of Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territories and its fallout, including the illegal detention of thousands of Arabs and the violation of their rights. Those allegations emanate from the occupying regime and are relayed by Zionist quarters across the globe to overshadow its crimes.

Iran supports the people and the Governments of Palestine and Lebanon and is prepared to provide them with political and humanitarian assistance in helping them restore their legitimate right to territorial integrity and self-determination.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): I commend you personally, Mr. President, for having calmly but persistently nudged your colleagues in the Council to do something, and to do it immediately, to halt what is increasingly becoming a dangerous, senseless and destructive war. I would also like to strongly commend the Secretary-General for laying before the Council yesterday comprehensive, bold and far-reaching proposals to bring about an immediate end to the carnage.

First and foremost, however, we must work to achieve an immediate and unequivocal ceasefire. The elements contained in the Secretary-General's proposals provide the basis for diplomatic and political efforts to bringing about a lasting solution to the hostilities in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions.

We are faced with a tragedy in the Middle East that threatens the viability and liveability of that region as we know it. An extensive array of weapons is being deployed to such an extent as to threaten the lives of everyone. No one, it appears, is out of range or safe. As the Secretary-General has said, what is most urgently required is the immediate cessation of hostilities, without which relief for survivors — the wounded and the suffering — cannot be given, or even humanitarian assistance provided to those in need. Even the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon itself has no freedom of movement and is running out of basic necessities. Given those circumstances and dangers, it was reassuring to hear the Secretary-General proclaim that we are not going to desert the Lebanese people in their hour of need.

The Hizbollah abduction of Israeli soldiers was both reckless and senseless and must be condemned. In the highly tense climate of the Middle East, that act was tailor-made to provoke a response from Israel, which it did. Israel lost no time in describing Hizbollah's action as an act of war. And what followed was, indeed, a war. The response was so excessive, so destructive and so inhumane as to bring into question the real motives of Israel. Israel declared a unilateral war on Lebanon, citing the unprovoked action by Hizbollah as a justification for the relentless and massive destruction of infrastructure and the collective punishment of the Lebanese people.

Was the overreaction worth the virtual obliteration of a nation and its physical infrastructure? That war is in its tenth day and is continuing as I speak, causing untold loss and suffering on both sides. Any country's right to self-defence is enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Inherent in this right, however, is the principle, as well as the responsibility, of justified response to aggression. Israel's unchallenged large-scale assault and systematic destruction, before our very eyes, of a sovereign nation that is a Member of this Organization cannot be justified under any pretext as self-defence. The siege of Lebanon is illegal, unwarranted and reckless. It is totally unacceptable, unjustified and immoral to bring a whole country to a halt by subjecting it to a merciless and relentless pounding and blockade on all sides.

Lebanon has suddenly become a large prison, a huge humanitarian crisis, with people crying in desperation, "Where is the international community? Where is the Security Council?" If the destruction of a whole sovereign nation matters less than the capture or death of one or two soldiers, is not this scary for our civilization? Where is the proportionality? Are we condoning this bizarre act of impunity, a sort of law of the jungle that has no parallel in recent memory? Will we not heed the embattled Lebanese Prime Minister, in his sheer helplessness, crying that his country has been torn to shreds and that no Government can survive on the ruins of a nation? No doubt what has been unfolding over the past 10 days has created a dangerous precedent in international governance and in inter-State relations.

It has been equally dismaying to observe the "no action" mode pursued by the Security Council and key players in the international community, many of whom have assumed the classic pose of the three monkeys who see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil. The world is virtually devoid of leadership, to say the least, in bringing about the urgently needed immediate cessation of hostilities. What now exists is a conundrum in which each side must present a face more resistant to compromise than the other. The consequences for the region can only be further escalation and destruction, moving further and further away from peace and security for all.

Again, as the Secretary-General notes, whatever damage Israel's operation may be doing to Hizbollah's military capabilities, they are doing little or nothing to decrease popular support for Hizbollah in Lebanon or the region. Israel's actions are seen there for what they are: collective punishment of the entire civilian population of Lebanon. As one analyst has pointed out, what we are viewing on our television screens day in and day out is sheer arrogance, a distortion of reality and a projection of military superiority — all to the detriment of reaching a comprehensive, genuine and peaceful settlement of the conflict.

We agree that, in due course, there will be an urgent need to arrange an international conference on the situation regarding Lebanon, to assemble an appropriate peacekeeping force capable of maintaining peace in the area, and to rapidly put together a donors conference to secure funding for an urgent aid package for the rehabilitation, reconstruction and development of Lebanon. Sadly though, while the Security Council and key players maintain a resounding silence as the carnage continues, each passing hour makes progress towards the realization of such goals much harder.

We all know that, following the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier in Gaza by Palestinian fighters a few weeks ago — which we condemned — Israel resorted to a full-scale war of bombardment that included major destruction of vital infrastructure, including power plants, depriving hundreds of thousands of civilians of electricity and water in the sweltering heat of summer. The blockade of Gaza — and the indiscriminate, disproportionate and collective punishment of Palestinians continue. We urge Israel to lift the siege and to allow for the flow of humanitarian relief to affected people.

The Secretary-General's impassioned urging of Israel yesterday here in the Council to reopen the closed crossing points — without which, in his words, "Gaza will continue to be sucked into a downward spiral of suffering and chaos and the region further inflamed" (*S/PV.5492, p. 4*) — must be heeded. As we all know, until Israel accepts the rights of Palestinians and refrains from shortcuts and unilateral acts that prejudice final status issues, and until it negotiates in good faith, there will be no end in sight, regrettably, to the vicious cycle of violence. What is required is boldness, determination and farsightedness on the part of Israel to use its power towards achieving peace with its neighbours, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). That is very long overdue.

Surely, as we all know by now, peace and security in the Middle East can never be driven by either sheer power or misplaced pride, but by pragmatism and realism. Security for all comes not through unending conflict and warfare but through a desire for genuine peace that recognizes the existence and rights of all the peoples in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

Ms. Banks (New Zealand): New Zealand has observed with deep concern the escalation in hostilities in the Middle East, involving the occupied Palestinian territory, Israel and Lebanon. We condemn the loss of innocent civilian lives and the destruction of vital civilian infrastructure. We strongly urge all sides to pull back from violence, observe international law and allow international facilitators and mediators a chance to put a peace process together.

We condemn the killing and detention of Israeli soldiers by the military wing of Hamas and by Hizbollah. The soldiers must be released immediately, and unharmed. Hizbollah must stop its rocket attacks on Israel, which have taken civilian lives. States with influence over Hamas and Hizbollah must act for restraint, in the interests of the wider international community. The message to Hamas and Hizbollah must be that confrontation and violence are destroying the prospects for a peace settlement in the Middle East.

At the same time, we cannot accept that Israel has reacted with due proportionality or caution. Its attacks on the occupied Palestinian territories and on Lebanon, targeting militants and infrastructure, have also destroyed housing and caused hundreds of casualties, most of them civilians. It is causing further suffering through the denial of the basic necessities of life and through forced displacement that is affecting hundreds of thousands of people. Israel must heed the many calls to restrain itself and allow full and immediate access to relief efforts. It must release officials of the Palestinian Authority whom it has detained.

The Secretary-General is to be commended for his efforts to bring about an immediate ceasefire and to begin the process of negotiating and implementing a solution to the crisis. He will need the full and active support of the Security Council to achieve that objective. New Zealand supports the thrust of his proposals and urges the Security Council to give them active and positive consideration.

There has been an ongoing failure to address and resolve the root causes of the conflict in the Middle East. The extremist message, which we deplore, has resonated where injustice, deprivation, fear and hopelessness reign. That philosophy is very dangerous for the Middle East region and the rest of the world. A ceasefire in Lebanon and the resolution of the immediate causes of the conflict must be followed by negotiations for a comprehensive peace in the region, if such crises are to be avoided in the future.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Sen (India): We thank you, Mr. President, for scheduling this meeting. As this is the first time I take the floor during your presidency, allow me to congratulate you on your skilful and capable handling of your presidency. I also wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Ambassador of Denmark for her presidency of the Council last month.

India is seriously concerned about the escalating tension in West Asia as a result of the developments in the Gaza Strip and on the Israel-Lebanese border and in Lebanon, which have the potential to inflame the region further and widen the conflict.

India condemned the abduction of two Israeli soldiers on 12 July 2006 and has called for their immediate release. We have equally strongly condemned the excessive and disproportionate military retaliation by Israel, which has targeted civilian infrastructure, including the Beirut airport, and resulted in the killing and suffering of innocent civilians, including women and children. The responsibility to protect women and children in conflict has to be real, and not theoretical.

At least one Indian national has been killed and several injured in the bombings in Lebanon. There can be no justification for the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, which merits condemnation and is contrary to international law.

In his briefing to the Security Council yesterday, the Secretary-General called for a ceasefire to prevent further loss of life, provide humanitarian access and give diplomacy a chance to work. In addition, the Secretary-General elaborated the elements of a plan, suggested by the United Nations mission to the region, which he said must form the basis of any lasting ceasefire. We believe that the international community can no longer remain silent in the face of the severe escalation of the conflict, in which civilian populations have been affected and a humanitarian crisis is looming. A spillover of the conflict beyond the region is a distinct possibility.

The Secretary-General's plan offers a firm basis for discussions in the Security Council on how the issue has to be addressed. An immediate and comprehensive ceasefire would be predicated on the return of the captured Israeli soldiers, the extension of the authority of the Government of Lebanon over all of its territory, and immediate measures to provide relief and rehabilitation to the people of Lebanon, and therefore a withdrawal of Israeli forces.

As a major troop contributor to both the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), India is concerned about the conditions under which United Nations peacekeepers in the conflict zone are required to perform their duties. The Secretary-General, in his update yesterday on UNIFIL, stated that UNIFIL had no freedom of movement, which precluded it from even providing humanitarian escorts for displaced people; that it was experiencing difficulties in receiving essential supplies; and that it was exposed to considerable risk from the ongoing exchange of fire. These are cause for serious concern. Unilateral restrictions on UNIFIL have to be removed, and the mandate of the United Nations and the sanctity of its personnel have to be respected.

There is equal concern about the situation in the Gaza Strip. On 12 June, India condemned the killing of innocent civilians, including women and children, by the Israel Defence Force in an unprovoked attack on 9 June. India also condemned the incident at the Kerem Shalom crossing near Gaza on 25 June, which provoked the threat of massive retaliatory measures by Israel.

India is seriously concerned at the hardships and suffering of the Palestinian people as a result of the evolving situation in Gaza and the West Bank — a situation that, I may add, has been exacerbated by Israel's destruction of Palestinian infrastructure, including roads, bridges and power plants. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has determined that nearly half the population in the Gaza Strip is currently without electricity and that this situation could persist for up to nine months. This reduced capacity is affecting the provision of water, with daily access for families being cut by up to 50 per cent in some parts of the Gaza Strip. India condemns the wholly unjustified arrest and continuing incarceration of Ministers of the Palestinian National Authority and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. There can be no justification whatsoever for taking such action against duly elected representatives of the Palestinian people. We call upon Israel to release them immediately and unconditionally.

The international community needs to call for an immediate halt to hostilities on all sides, control utmost restraint, especially in the excessive use of force, and urge a return to dialogue. We also reiterate our call on all parties to renounce violence and to resolve their differences through peaceful means. Israel must halt its offensive, withdraw its forces from their positions inside Gaza and release all political figures and other Palestinians. At the same time, the Palestinian leadership should make every effort to facilitate the release of the Israeli soldier and prevent

any escalation of the conflict through rocket attacks against Israel or other extremist actions by militants.

In response to a request from the Palestinian authorities, and in keeping with India's traditional and consistent policy of extending sympathy and support to the people of Palestine, the Government of India has decided to give immediate humanitarian assistance in the amount of 100 million rupees to the Palestinian people in order to alleviate the difficult situation in which the Palestinian people find themselves. This is in addition to the approximately 700 million rupees of assistance pledged last year during the visit of President Abbas to India. The assistance will be primarily in the form of life-saving drugs and medical supplies requested by the Palestinian authorities.

We support the Secretary-General's call for an immediate cessation of indiscriminate and disproportionate violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a reopening of the closed crossing points. It is unfortunate that President Abbas was held incommunicado in Gaza for the last three weeks and not allowed to meet anyone. The international community needs to support a peace track for Gaza and President Abbas's call for a proper dialogue with the Government of Israel.

It is our firm belief that a negotiated outcome of this longstanding conflict is the only way to ensure long-term peace, security and stability in the region, leading to the establishment of a viable, united and sovereign State of Palestine, living in peaceful coexistence and harmony with the State of Israel.

In conclusion, it is vital that the international community act to put an immediate end to the hostilities and to ensure that the conflict does not widen and engulf the entire region. We support the role of the regional powers in finding a solution to the crisis, as solutions imposed through unilateral measures may not prove enduring. A comprehensive solution to the situation in West Asia, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, offers the best way forward. Our commitment to the Palestinian cause was articulated by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and other leaders. What Jawaharlal Nehru, one of the great founders of the Non-Aligned Movement, wrote in a letter dated 11 July 1947 to Albert Einstein remains relevant:

> "I do not myself see how this problem can be resolved by violence and conflict on one side or the other. Even if such violence and conflict achieve certain ends for the moment, they must necessarily be temporary. I do earnestly hope that some kind of agreement might be arrived at between the Arabs and the Jews. I do not think even an outside power can impose its will for long or enforce some new arrangements against the will of the parties concerned."

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker on my list is the representative of Chile, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Muñoz (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this very important meeting.

The Government of Chile expresses its deepest regret at the situation prevailing in the Middle East as a result of the escalation of violence in the region. We condemn the disproportionate measures taken by the Israeli forces, which have caused hundreds of deaths in Lebanon — a majority of them civilians — as well as the intentional destruction of infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and in Lebanon, which threatens to engender a humanitarian disaster.

We condemn also the attacks carried out by Hizbollah, which have caused the death of civilians, as well as its kidnapping of two soldiers. The indiscriminate missile attacks against cities in northern Israel are unacceptable. The soldiers should be released, as should the Palestinian Authority officials who remain under arrest in Gaza.

All of these factors only intensify the spiral of violence that is endangering peace and stability throughout the region. For that reason, we call on all parties involved to put an immediate end to armed actions, and we call on Israel forces to withdraw from Lebanon and from the Gaza Strip. We call also on Hizbollah to stop the violence and its indiscriminate attacks, and we urge that the Government of Lebanon exercise its sovereignty throughout its territory, with the help of the international community, if Beirut so requests.

We firmly support the suggestion made yesterday by the Secretary-General that a diplomatic approach be taken involving a package of practical measures aimed at addressing the emergency situation and providing a solution — hopefully a lasting one — to the crisis.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon includes Chilean military officers, and Chile will continue to work along the lines that the Secretary-General has suggested.

With regard to the severe humanitarian crisis that is affecting the Palestinian and Lebanese people, the Government of Chile has taken the following measures.

First, we supported the resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council, which decided to send a special mission to assess the human rights situation in Palestine. Secondly, we have sent a shipment of medicines so as to help alleviate, at least in part, the severe humanitarian and health situation of the Palestinian people in Gaza. Thirdly, we will very soon be sending medicines and other humanitarian assistance to the thousands of civilians affected by the bombings in central and southern Lebanon. Fourthly, just today we sent a Boeing 707 to Damascus in order to repatriate numerous Chileans and other Latin American nationals trapped in the midst of the conflict.

Finally, we repeat our call to return to the path of dialogue and reason. The history of the region shows that military solutions have always failed, and the cost has been mainly paid by innocent victims.

The Government of Chile reiterates the importance of strictly adhering to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, particularly with respect to the settlement of disputes, condemnation of the use or threat of the use of force and full compliance with the resolutions of the Security Council.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Arias Cárdenas (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, on behalf of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I bring greetings to the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela fully supports the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Malaysia on behalf of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela condemns the Israeli military incursions into the occupied Palestinian territories and into Lebanese territory and the violation of Syrian airspace. On this occasion, more than ever before, what has happened in the last few days is extremely serious. From this same place, where effective measures should have been devised to avoid death and destruction, we send our condolences to the families of all the countries affected by these abominable acts.

Deeds have been carried out that indiscriminately affect the territories and peoples of Lebanon and Palestine. A military campaign to bomb the physical infrastructure of Lebanon and parts of Gaza has been undertaken. Bridges have been destroyed, as have power stations that provide for the energy needs of those peoples. Lebanon has been blockaded by land, sea and air. These incursions are completely out of all proportion and have destabilized the Middle East region. One third of the deaths have been of children. Venezuela condemns those acts and demands that they cease immediately.

The United Nations staff members who provide humanitarian assistance to victims in Lebanon have been attacked, which has prevented them from fulfilling their role in assisting those who have been affected by the confrontation.

We condemn the arrest of parliamentarians and members of the Palestinian National Authority. Those acts are a flagrant violation of international law. The fact that the Palestinian people freely chose a given political group is no justification for this deplorable conduct.

Our country is convinced that maintaining peace and international security depends on the premise that relationships between States, quite apart from ideological, cultural and political differences, should be governed by the very strict adherence to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and by respect for international law, including the principle of peaceful coexistence between States.

The Security Council cannot become an accomplice of destruction and death. For a long time now within the Council there has been an obstructionist policy with regard to a balanced, just and consensus action to resolve the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. That demonstrates double standards that in no way

contribute to a fair, broad and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Security Council should fulfil the role that is incumbent upon it in a courageous and responsible way.

The recent recourse to the veto could be understood as complicity with the death and destruction that is now occurring in the Middle East.

In the United Nations, we are witnessing a new outrage that joins a long list of failures that represent, one after another, lamentable episodes that taint the history of the Organization — Iraq, Afghanistan, Rwanda — Is it possible that we could finally put an end to this situation of death and destruction?

We cannot set aside the idea that, in view of the Council's failure to act, we should invoke the resolution entitled "Uniting for Peace" (General Assembly resolution 377 (V)) of 3 November 1950 for an emergency session of the General Assembly to discuss in a very broad, transparent and democratic way the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and in this way adopt a resolution that would not be vetoed.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reiterates its solidarity with the innocent victims and calls upon the Member States of the Organization to develop a joint effort that would lead to the immediate cessation of hostilities and the resumption of negotiations that would promote the advent of a much desired peace, to which all peoples of the world have the right.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mrs. Núñez Mordoche (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba fully supports the statement made by the representative of Malaysia on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

At this difficult time Cuba reaffirms its full solidarity with the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples, who are suffering again today the ruthless and cynical aggression of the Tel Aviv regime.

Once more, we are gathered in this room to discuss issues related to the continued and flagrant violations of international peace and security, in the face of which this Council — the United Nations organ that supposedly should confront acts of aggression according to the mandate conferred on it by the United Nations Charter — sits with hands folded, as further evidence of the double standard to which we are becoming accustomed.

Israel's escalation of military attacks on the Palestinian people continues and increases despite strong international condemnation. Every day the number of innocent victims grows, every day the situation worsens for more than a million defenceless civilians, because practically all the infrastructure necessary to their survival is being destroyed. The already critical humanitarian situation is further deteriorating in the illegally occupied territories.

Cuba condemns this inhumane and criminal aggression that deliberately seeks to put an economic and military stranglehold upon the resistance of the Palestinian people. The Security Council keeps silence and does not seem to be in a position to take strong action against the aggressor. With that inaction the Council is ensuring the impunity of this barbarism.

This unpunished and continued aggression has undermined the spirit of the agreement reached between Palestinian political forces, which would allow for the resumption of peace negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, as provided in relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

Israel continues to act with impunity under the cover of the United States permanent veto in the Security Council. Just few days ago, that country wielded its veto power for the thirtieth time in connection with Council draft resolutions related to occupied Palestinian territories. Once again, the hegemonic Power is utterly paralyzing the Council and disregards the will of the overwhelming majority of the international community.

One front of aggression is apparently not sufficient for the Zionist State. On 12 July Israel launched a new large-scale military operation, this time against the Lebanese Republic. The number of civilian deaths is increasing with every passing day. The destruction of the country's infrastructure — including the runways of the Beirut international airport — is ongoing, and the water and power supplies for the civilian population have been seriously affected. As part of its aggression, the Israeli Government has imposed a tight naval and air blockade on the entire country and has openly and directly threatened to proceed with its aggression and to raze the southern

suburbs of the capital of Lebanon as further proof of its known genocidal policy against the Arab peoples.

Cuba has on countless occasions denounced Israeli violations of all the norms of international law by its military attack on a sovereign country under the spurious pretext of protecting its security, with the economic and military support and blatant and perfidious complicity of the United States Government, which through its veto power guarantees impunity for the aggressor regime and acts as a wall in the Security Council to prevent any form of condemnation.

Once again, the Security Council's passivity regarding any issue that perturbs Washington and its allies could lead to a new humanitarian crisis with grave consequences for the entire region.

On 16 July, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba issued a statement strongly condemning the savage military aggression by Israel against the Lebanese Republic and urging the international community and peace-loving forces to mobilize and demand that Israel immediately put an end to such barbaric acts, return to Lebanon the territories that it has occupied and respect the most basic norms of international law.

This meeting has been convened to debate the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We ask what issue relating to the region could be brought before the Security Council under the present circumstances other than the barbaric Israeli acts against the Palestinian people and the direct attacks against a sovereign State — the Lebanese Republic. The only valid outcome of this meeting would be the adoption of measures to put a stop to the genocide and aggression and to condemn the perpetrator of the genocide and aggression.

We therefore reiterate once again that the Security Council must act without delay and assume the responsibilities conferred on it by the Charter. This body cannot continue to remain silent and complicit in the face of these grave developments that are endangering international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker is the representative of the Sudan, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Abdelsalam (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): We welcome your initiative, Mr. President, to convene this open meeting. We hope that our deliberations will awaken the conscience of the international community and put an end to the barbaric acts that have shocked the world. This is a tragedy that has taken us back to the law of the jungle.

We are addressing the Council today as the Israeli killing machine goes on a rampage. It is running amok, indiscriminately killing innocent and unarmed Lebanese civilians, spilling the blood of children and women, including the elderly, the disabled and the sick. It has spilled the blood of innocent people in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. It has deliberately demolished houses and killed and injured hundreds of people. All of these actions continue as we speak, yet there is a suspicious silence on the subject. We are shocked that all of the killing and destruction is being committed under the pretext of self-defence — a pretext that seems to have magical power. It lets the genie out of the bottle so as to allow the killing and destruction to continue.

We condemn the Israeli military operations and the bombing that has targeted the Lebanese infrastructure. The Israelis have bombed Beirut international airport. They have destroyed bridges, sea ports and residential neighbourhoods. Israeli bombs and missiles have killed entire families, and the number of casualties is now in the hundreds. More than 1 million unarmed citizens have been forced to flee. They have been displaced or are confined to shelters under desperate humanitarian conditions and require urgent assistance and relief from the international community.

The Sudan strongly condemns the systematic and methodical State terrorism being perpetrated by Israel in an unprecedented manner. This should remind everyone that we are gathered together under the banner of this Organization to hold steadfastly to the norms of humanitarian law, the Articles of the Charter and the guarantees provided by United Nations bodies, particularly the Security Council, which is entrusted with the maintenance of peace and security. All Member States should continue to firmly uphold those principles on an equal basis. Where is that equal basis now? A State has flouted and violated all of those norms and covenants. Where is the political will of the Council to rise to meet the expectations of the peoples of the world and put a stop to the practice of State terrorism and the killing of innocent civilians, the destruction of infrastructure and the excessive, indiscriminate and unjustifiable use of force?

The world was frustrated a few days ago when it witnessed the total failure of the Council to halt the Israeli aggression against Gaza and the other occupied Palestinian territories. We are saying that so that Israel does not think it is perpetrating those crimes under the cover provided by the Council.

We appeal for decisive measures to halt the Israeli war against Lebanon and to find a just solution to the crisis. The international community should shoulder its responsibility. The Council should act to bring about, first, a comprehensive and immediate ceasefire under United Nations auspices; secondly, the restoration of all the occupied Lebanese territories; and, thirdly, the release of all Lebanese prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons. Fourthly, it should respond to the Lebanese appeal for relief and the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance and lift the air, sea and land blockade imposed by Israel against Lebanon. Fifthly, it must hold Israel responsible for the humanitarian crisis and the destruction of the economy of Lebanon and demand compensation for that destruction. Sixthly, an urgent plan must be drawn up for the reconstruction of Lebanon in which friendly countries and international organizations participate. Finally, the Council must demand the immediate cessation of the crime of genocide perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker is the representative of Canada.

Mr. McNee (Canada): Today violence rages in the Middle East once again. It is civilians on all sides who pay the heaviest price. We extend our deep condolences to the families of all the victims affected by this crisis. Canadians have been directly affected by this crisis. Recently, eight Canadians visiting relatives were killed in southern Lebanon. As we speak, Canada is working hard to rescue its nationals and others who wish to leave Lebanon.

The dynamics in the region must change. Sovereign, democratic countries like Lebanon cannot be held hostage by terrorists. As we have all seen to our dismay, the independent acts of terrorist organizations, encouraged by countries supporting them, can quickly embroil neighbouring countries in hostilities. This serves no one's interests.

The crisis in Lebanon has escalated at an alarming pace, and the greatest toll has been exacted upon innocent civilians in Lebanon and Israel. Hizbollah violated Israel's sovereignty, unprovoked. Israel's response to the abduction and killing of its soldiers was an exercise of its right to self-defence. The G-8 reinforced this principle in its 16 July Saint Petersburg Declaration — to which Canada adheres strongly — calling upon Israel to exercise utmost restraint and seek to avoid casualties among innocent civilians and damage to civilian infrastructure, and to refrain from acts that would destabilize the Government of Lebanon.

It is now clear that Hizbollah's objectives went far beyond the abduction of Israeli soldiers. It is also obvious that the abduction was only the prelude to a major offensive intended to inflict as much pain and suffering as possible, which is evident in Hizbollah's indiscriminate launching of hundreds of rockets into urban areas deep in Israel with devastating consequences, including the deaths of innocents. It was also intended to sabotage the internal Lebanese democratic political dialogue, whose objectives include fulfilling resolution 1559 (2004). And finally, it was intended to serve the interests of Hizbollah's backers in Damascus and Tehran.

This body passed resolution 1559 (2004) in an earnest effort to disarm the terrorist organization Hizbollah. It is a tragedy for Lebanon that since that time Hizbollah has been allowed to operate with impunity in southern Lebanon. The heaviest costs in this regard continue to be borne by the Lebanese people. Canada is already contributing to international humanitarian efforts to assist them.

Although the Lebanese Government has been faced with a formidable challenge, Syria and Iran — countries that aid and abet Hizbollah with financial and military support — must be held accountable. It is also essential that any country in the area that has influence on this terrorist organization should encourage an end to violence and the recognition of Israel's right to exist.

The key to ending this senseless violence lies with Hizbollah. It must stop the rocket attacks. It must release the abducted soldiers.

Canada also reaffirms the G-8's call for the Security Council to examine without delay the possibility of deploying an international security monitoring presence in Lebanon. This should be accompanied by the development of a political framework to create conditions for stability and a lasting peace. Canada also strongly endorses the G-8's

appeal to the Council to develop a plan for the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004). This body must play a role in the implementation of that resolution, and we welcome the Secretary-General's efforts in this regard.

The situation in Gaza is also deeply troubling. Canada is committed to supporting President Abbas and continues to call on the Palestinian Authority to take immediate steps to bring peace and stability to its people. The resolution to this crisis begins with ceasing the launching of Qassam rockets into Israeli towns and immediately and unconditionally returning the young Israeli corporal to his family.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada urges Israel to exercise the utmost restraint in its operations in Gaza and to respect international humanitarian law, including with regard to the free flow of basic necessities of life. Civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip has already been largely devastated, and the civilian victims are more numerous every day. Ultimately, a negotiated settlement is the only road forward.

Canada endorses the Quartet's conditions for the Palestinian Authority — that is, to recognize Israel's fundamental right to exist, to accept previously signed agreements, and, finally, to renounce violence. An end to violence includes recognizing Israel as a legitimate neighbour and its right to lasting security. It also includes recognizing the right of Palestinians to their own State: independent, viable and capable of achieving the aspirations of their people.

It is the responsibility of all parties to work for the cessation of violence. Only then can the international community move towards repairing the terrible damage that has been done over the past week and generate a process aimed at a lasting solution to this conflict that has gone on for too long. Not only the Security Council, but also all of the United Nations and its Member States must play a more significant role in the Middle East if we are to achieve long-term security and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Skinner-Klee (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, first of all I would like to thank you for having organized this open debate, which allows those countries that are not Council members to put forward our views with regard to the dramatic deterioration of the situation in the Middle East, which is extremely dangerous for the security of the whole region.

As have the majority of delegations that have participated in this debate, the delegation of Guatemala wishes to express its concern and regret at the deepening crisis in the Middle East. My delegation joins the statement made by the representative of Malaysia on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Guatemala deplores the tragic death of innocent civilians in the last few days due to the crisis between Israel and Lebanon, and what has been happening in the Gaza Strip since 25 June. We are concerned at the grave situation and call on all parties to exercise utmost moderation. We also stress the importance of diplomatic and political measures and urge all parties to carry out all possible efforts to solve the present situation through peaceful means in order to put an end to hostilities.

We urge the parties to respect international law at all times, including international humanitarian law. We remind them of their responsibility to protect the lives of civilians and to refrain from attacking essential civilian infrastructure. It is absolutely necessary to re-establish electricity and water supplies and to ensure unrestricted and continuous access to humanitarian organizations, guaranteeing the safety of their staff, in order to avoid a humanitarian crisis in the region, especially in the Gaza Strip and in the south of Lebanon.

My delegation condemns the arrest by Israel of democratically elected authorities and other officials of Palestine. At the same time, we condemn the kidnapping and detention of an Israeli soldier by Palestinian militants. The quick freeing of all of them is an essential step to avoid a worsening of the situation in the region. It is also essential for the Government of the Palestinian Authority to adopt effective and immediate measures to improve the security and prevent terrorist attacks on Israel, including the launching of missiles against its territory.

We reiterate our commitment to cooperate with all the parties in seeking a broad, just and lasting peace for the Middle East, based on compliance with pertinent Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and

1515 (2003), as well as the agreements of the Madrid Conference and the principle of land for peace. In effect, Israel has the right to live in peace within secure borders, as does Palestine.

Guatemala deplores and vehemently condemns the confrontations provoked by Hizbollah in the border area between Lebanon and Israel since 12 July, and the launching of missiles against the Israeli civilian population in that area. We are extremely alarmed at the increase in tensions in that area, and so my Government once again urges all parties to stop the escalation of hostilities that would mark a new and dangerous deterioration in the regional situation.

In that context, Guatemala urges the Government of Lebanon to spare no effort to ensure that the two Israeli soldiers captured by the Hizbollah militia are unconditionally released as soon as possible. It also urges the Government of Israel to withdraw as soon as possible from Lebanese territory and to respect the Blue Line in order to re-establish stability in the region and guarantee the security of the civilian population.

Israel has every right to act in self-defence. However, it should act with moderation and ensure that its actions are proportionate and reasonable. Our country is extremely concerned at the Israeli military actions, in particular at the excessive use of force, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, especially airports, power grids, bridges and roads, attacks against densely populated areas that endanger the lives of innocent civilians, and the imposition of a sea, air and land blockade against Lebanon. We urge that an immediate end be put to such practices.

On the other hand, we demand also that Hizbollah stop launching rockets into Israeli territory. My delegation calls for an immediate end to the hostilities and for the beginning of peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations.

In that respect, we call once again for the implementation, without further delay, of the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 425 (1978), 1559 (2004) and other, subsequent ones.

Guatemala welcomes and supports the Secretary-General's initiative to send a high-level delegation to contribute to defusing tension. It calls for respect for international humanitarian law and for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, as well as for the deployment of a multinational force in the area.

For all those reasons, we reiterate the call made by the Non-Aligned Movement, as we believe that the Security Council has the responsibility to prevent an even greater polarization among all the parties involved and to help them find alternatives to the escalating violence. We view the work of the Council as a complementary effort, in a spirit of convergence, to those of other actors in the international community, including the Secretary-General's measures. The Council cannot abdicate its responsibility to protect civilians or its competence in the area of the maintenance of international peace and security.

Guatemala, as a nation that has suffered from conflict and the resulting violence, calls for reason to prevail, for the protection of human life and for the safeguarding of human rights, with a view to putting an end to all violence and intolerance, so as not to condemn the region to a future of even greater violence and suffering.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker on my list is Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Badji: Mr. President, allow me at the outset to congratulate you on the exemplary manner in which you have steered the work of the Council during the month of July. I am grateful to you and to the other members of the Council for having given me the opportunity to participate in this debate on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The Council is meeting today to consider the very alarming situation in the Middle East. While the world's attention is mostly focussed on the grave situation in Lebanon, Israel's military activities in the occupied Palestinian territory are continuing unabated. Since Israel's escalation of its military operation in the Gaza Strip after the capture of an Israeli soldier on 25 June, more than 100 Palestinians have been killed, including many civilians. Hundreds more have been wounded. The number of casualties is also rising in the West Bank, where Israeli incursions into major cities continue.

The military activities of the occupying Power are also deliberately causing a major humanitarian crisis among the innocent civilian population. The only power plant in the Gaza Strip was destroyed by Israel right at the outset of its operation, and more than

1 million people are living without electricity for most of the day — electricity which is needed, among other things, to operate water wells, the main source of drinking water. International relief efforts are constantly being hampered, if not completely prevented, by the occupying Power, because of the almost total closure of the Gaza borders.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People condemns the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of Israel's military might against the Palestinian population. Deliberate attacks by Israeli forces against civilian property and infrastructure in the Gaza Strip violate international humanitarian law. The continued closure of the crossing points of the Strip constitutes collective punishment of an entire innocent population. Israel needs to be reminded that, as an occupying Power, it is bound under international law to protect and safeguard the basic human rights of the Palestinian population.

The Committee has also called for a cessation of rocket attacks on Israel and other violent actions by Palestinian armed groups that put civilians in serious danger and inflame and destabilize the already fragile situation.

The Committee would also like to voice its frustration at the inability of the international community to de-escalate the alarming situation in Lebanon and in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We deplore the fact that the Council was not in a position to adopt a draft resolution that was widely perceived as a balanced first step to engage the parties to end violence and embark upon a comprehensive ceasefire. The Committee considers that the Council should live up to its responsibilities and help end the current escalation, which is causing bloodshed and misery in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Committee continues to consider that the occupation by Israel of Palestinian territory remains the root cause of the conflict. This longstanding conflict can have no final solution without the achievement by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, defined by the General Assembly in 1974 as the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted. The Committee will continue its work under the mandate given to it by the General Assembly.

The President (*spoke in French*): The next speaker on my list is the representative of the United Arab Emirates, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Al-Otaiba (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am delighted, on behalf of the United Arab Emirates, to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the distinguished manner in which you have presided over the Security Council this month, and I wish you every success. I would like also to seize this opportunity to thank your predecessor, the representative of Denmark, for her wise leadership of the Council last month.

Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories are facing barbarous destruction at the hands of Israel. It is general and deliberate destruction of their social and economic infrastructure as well as the displacement and massacre of thousands of their inhabitants — in particular women, children and the poor — by Israeli forces that are equipped with the most sophisticated weapons, including weapons condemned by the international community. Those actions are a stark and blatant violation of all international law provisions, the United Nations Charter, and human rights conventions, including the Geneva conventions. In addition, those actions constitute an organized war crime and State terrorism, which are punishable under international law.

Under no condition can those barbarous and criminal Israeli acts, committed largely against civilians, be justified. Those actions include the adoption by Israel of a scorched-earth policy and collective punishment targeting civilian infrastructures that had been funded by donors over many years. Electricity and water supplies have also been cut, as well as humanitarian assistance. Israel has justified those actions through its legitimate right to self-defence. The question may be raised, however — how can two peoples, in their entirety, be punished, and how can they be exposed to such treatment for the sake of the so-called campaign by Israel to release its soldiers who have been abducted for a swap with political prisoners detained in Israeli jails for years, including children and women?

My country condemns the use of force and military solutions, as such solutions do not solve the problems of the civilian population. On the contrary, military action complicates and prolongs such

problems. Therefore we strongly condemn the continued Israeli aggression against Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.

In addition, we remain deeply concerned by the inability of the Security Council to put an end to the suffering of the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples. We believe that such inaction incites Israel to continue its barbarous violations and destruction in the Lebanese and Palestinian territories. Therefore, we urge the Security Council to reject the double-standard policy and put pressure on Israel to end its aggression against the Lebanese and the Palestinian peoples, and thus, create greater balance in the region, rather than conflict.

We urge the United Nations to take action to mobilize humanitarian support on the part of the international community in order to alleviate the suffering of the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples. In that respect, we support all the current diplomatic efforts aimed at finding a just, peaceful and comprehensive solution to the crisis in the region. Moreover, we support the attempts aimed — as far as Lebanon is concerned — at the proclamation of an immediate and unconditional ceasefire under the auspices of the United Nations, calling upon Israel to end its aggression against the Lebanese people, to stop targeting civilian populations, to ensure access to emergency humanitarian assistance in the affected areas, and to stop targeting humanitarian convoys, which has resulted in, among other things, the recent and unfortunate destruction of a convoy from the Arab Emirates which was carrying basic foodstuffs and medicines.

We also call for the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004), including the immediate withdrawal of Israel from the Sheba'a Farms, as well as the start of negotiations for the release of the detainees. Assistance should also be provided to the Lebanese Government so as to enable it to extend its authority over the entire Lebanese territory. An emergency meeting of donors should be convened in order to organize assistance for Lebanon and to reschedule Lebanese debt to enable it to cope with the current difficult conditions.

We reaffirm that our country, which has shown great generosity to Lebanon so far, will continue to offer assistance whenever it is required.

Concerning the occupied Palestinian territories, we call upon the Israeli Government to immediately cease all military operations in the Gaza Strip, withdraw all its troops from the occupied territories, release the thousands of detainees held in Israel, stop taking unilateral measures — including settlement activities and the construction of the separation wall — halt the implementation of extrajudicial measures and assaults with regard to the Palestinian people, and ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the affected areas. We also call for the liberation of the detainees of the Palestinian Authority, so that the Palestinian Authority can assume its full responsibilities with regard to its people.

Finally, we call upon Israel to compensate all victims of its actions in the region, in order to end the crisis and guarantee its own security. We cannot accept aggression. A solution to the problem can be achieved only through continued negotiation, a continuation of the peace process and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all the occupied Arab territories — including the Golan Heights, Jerusalem and southern Lebanon — in accordance with international resolutions, and the Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for the establishment of two States, a Palestinian State and an Israeli State, living peacefully, side by side, in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Maqungo (South Africa): Mr. President, we wish to thank you for convening this important meeting and also to commend you for the exemplary manner in which you have stewarded the Council during the month of July.

We would like to associate ourselves with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Malaysia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The South African Government is deeply concerned at the escalation of the conflict in Lebanon, northern Israel and the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in the loss of many lives and the destruction of critical infrastructure. Those attacks are clearly raising tensions in the region to new dangerous heights at a time when all sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be looking at ways to end the deadlock in negotiations and move the peace process forward.

The South African Government reiterates that Israel's use of air strikes in heavily populated areas to

carry out extrajudicial killings is against international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions. We cannot accept the principle of collective punishment. We do not believe that an entire nation can be attacked because of tensions with Hizbollah. The Government of South Africa calls on the Israeli Government to refrain from that type of action and, as a major military Power in the region, to act with restraint to avoid further civilian casualties and the destruction of vital infrastructure.

Furthermore, we call on the Palestinians and Hizbollah to release the Israeli prisoners, and we call for an end to the launching of rockets into Israel. Failure to do so is resulting in the Israeli military offensive that is causing massive death and destruction.

We welcome the package of elements put forward by the Secretary-General after the return of his diplomatic mission to the region. We believe that it is only through a cessation of hostilities — which would prevent further loss of innocent life, allow for full humanitarian access and give diplomacy a chance — that there will there be an opportunity to end the crisis.

We therefore urge the Security Council to act decisively and to assume its Charter-granted responsibility of contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security by working to urgently resolve this conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Chaudhry (Pakistan): We are grateful for the opportunity to share our deep concern over the prevailing chaos and gloom that afflict Lebanon and Palestinian territories.

The Government of Pakistan strongly condemns the Israeli aggression against Lebanon, which continues to cause bloodshed, loss of innocent life and damage to infrastructure and property. The President and Prime Minister of Pakistan, and many other world leaders, have called for an immediate ceasefire and a cessation of hostilities by all parties to the conflict. The loss of innocent life must stop. We believe it is a fundamental responsibility of the Security Council, as well as of major Powers and regional actors, to ensure that violence is halted, hostilities cease and peace is established.

We thank the Secretary-General for dispatching his team to the region to bring the current mayhem to an immediate end. We appreciate the briefing by the Secretary-General's Special Adviser this morning, which clearly brought out the magnitude of the problem before us.

The current situation is alarming, as the number of dead, injured and displaced persons is rising by the hour. The Government of Lebanon, with which we reiterate our solidarity, is facing a critical situation. The present situation is a direct result of actions against the principle, widely recognized in the Middle East, that there is no military solution to the conflict. The warring parties must therefore cease hostilities and give diplomacy and peace a chance.

We call upon the Government of Israel and Hizbollah to cease all military action forthwith. We urge the Council to take an objective view of the situation, to abide by its Charter responsibility to maintain international peace and security and to establish a ceasefire and ensure its scrupulous monitoring and respect by all parties concerned.

The international community, including the United Nations, should mobilize resources to provide humanitarian relief to the hundreds of thousands of displaced and traumatized people. Pakistan has already sent medical and food assistance to Lebanon.

We must also work assiduously towards long-term peace and stability in the region by ensuring that the relevant Security Council resolutions and bilateral and plurilateral agreements are implemented in both letter and spirit. The Security Council, major Powers and the Quartet must act immediately and resolutely to stop the attacks and the violence and to ensure that the peace process is put back on track.

We should not allow the current situation to push the region back into a spiral of violence. The Security Council's urgent intercession in that context is imperative. It must live up to its Charter obligations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mr. Nguyen Duy Chien (Viet Nam): Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement delivered by Ambassador Hamidon of Malaysia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Viet Nam is deeply concerned about the escalation of violence in the Middle East. It has caused hundreds of deaths and injuries, severely damaged

infrastructure and forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee from their homes. In fact, while we meet here, violence is continuing to escalate and the number of victims is increasing by the hour, if not the minute.

We are gravely worried about the dire humanitarian situation of the Lebanese people and about the possible humanitarian catastrophe now looming over the Middle East. We are also worried about the fact that United Nations agencies and their humanitarian partners are unable to reach southern Lebanon to assess the situation or to deliver humanitarian aid. Civilians, and children in particular, must be protected.

Viet Nam condemns all acts of terror and violence, all attacks against civilians and their property and the destruction of infrastructure. We condemn the abduction and detention of Government officials and other individuals and demand their immediate and unconditional release.

Viet Nam calls on the international community and donor countries to provide assistance and humanitarian aid to Lebanon. All air, sea and land blockades imposed on Lebanon recently should be lifted so that humanitarian activities can take place. The safety of the personnel of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon should also be ensured, to help them fulfil their mandate and provide humanitarian assistance to people in need.

Viet Nam calls on the parties concerned to stop the indiscriminate and excessive use of force and to exercise restraint and take practical steps to save the Middle East peace process, create favourable conditions to stabilize the situation and resolve the dispute through negotiations.

In the face of the grave situation prevailing in the Middle East, the international community should act urgently and decisively to stop violence and killing in the region. We call upon the Security Council to take prompt action in order to achieve an immediate cessation of hostilities and bring the parties concerned to the negotiating table, with a view to finding a long-lasting solution to the conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Mr. Berruga (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Government of Mexico has already made a statement on the conflict between Lebanon and Israel. However, we would like to once again state our condemnation of the provocation by Lebanese irregular forces that precipitated this crisis and of the disproportionate use of force that has caused destruction of fundamental civilian infrastructure and more than 500 civilian casualties in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.

As the Secretary-General has said, the actions of Hizbollah, although put forward as a defence of Palestinian and Lebanese interests, in fact serve neither of the two. Quite the contrary, it makes a whole nation a hostage.

However, we think that the most urgent thing at this moment is to move from the stage of recrimination to that of action, in the Security Council as well as on behalf of the international community. Yesterday, the Secretary-General presented the elements for a draft resolution of this organ. The immediate actions that are necessary are evident: the creation of humanitarian corridors, such as those approved this morning by Israel, which should be broad enough to reach the north of Lebanon, and freeing of Israeli hostages.

But this situation cannot be resolved with a simple ceasefire or intermediate steps such as those I have mentioned. Since the unilateral withdrawal by Israel in 2000, in compliance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), it has not been possible to stabilize the situation along the Blue Line. The efficacy of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), as the Secretary-General himself has said, has been questioned on repeated occasions.

In this context, the just and lasting solution to this conflict means guaranteeing the full sovereignty of the Government and the legitimate military forces of Lebanon in the south of its territory, along the Blue Line. This demand of the international community is already in resolution 1559 (2004). However, the Lebanese Government has not had the means necessary to implement it.

In this context, the proposal to create an international force, preferably under the auspices of the United Nations, is particularly relevant. In cooperation with Lebanese authorities, it would guarantee security and stability in the south of the country. This international force should have a broad mandate and, if necessary, should gradually replace the UNIFIL.

We also support the Secretary-General's proposal for implementing resolution 1680 (2006) with regard to

a definitive delimitation of international borders between Lebanon and its neighbours, Syria and Israel, including the question of the Shaba'a farms.

Once these urgent issues are resolved, the international community should monitor the compliance with resolution 1559 (2004) with regard to the disarmament of irregular forces operating in Lebanon. The United Nations should have a plan and a calendar for the definitive disarming of those forces, and, if necessary, the Security Council should provide the means to guarantee complying with this process.

Without a definitive disarming of the irregular forces that operate in Lebanon, there can be no guarantee of peace and stability, either within Lebanon or outside. Mexico reiterates its support for resolution 1559 (2004) as the best formula to guarantee the sovereignty and full independence of a stable and prosperous Lebanon that can live in peace with its neighbours.

Mexico also expresses its very deep concern at the very serious humanitarian situation of the population in Gaza. We make an urgent appeal to start implementing the measures proposed yesterday by the Secretary-General.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no other speakers on my list. The Security Council has therefore come to the end of its consideration of the item.

The meeting rose at 8 p.m.